

Performing Nation, Performing Trauma: Theatre and Performance  
After September 11th, Hurricane Katrina and the Peruvian Dirty War

by

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## ABSTRACT

Traumas are moments which disrupt a way of being, often involving death or injury and a period of recovery for its survivors. They can be personal, experienced by an individual, or collective, experienced by a group of individuals, such as a family. Others, like the bombing of Hiroshima, impact much larger communities, such as an entire town, an entire nation, or even the world. These national traumas often include large-scale death or injury and impact the lives of thousands. In addition to their immediate physical and material affects (mortalities, economic impact, creating a need for aid), these events shatter not only an individual's sense of well-being, but also larger notions of national identity, stability and security. In many cases, they also reveal the limits of prevailing concepts of national cohesiveness, citizenship and belonging while often simultaneously upholding or reconstructing newly problematic concepts of national cohesion. Traumas are documented and grappled with through various media, including literature, poetry, art, photography, and journalism. This dissertation, *Performing Nation, Performing Trauma: Theatre and Performance after September 11th, Hurricane Katrina and the Peruvian Dirty War*, examines how theatre and performance are utilized to respond to, document, memorialize and represent national traumas resulting from such historical crises as the Peruvian Dirty Wars, Hurricane Katrina, and September 11th, as well as how they resist dominant narratives that construct national traumas as such. These traumas are relived and expressed through performance perhaps precisely because the members of a nation (consciously or subconsciously) recognize that nation is also

performed. This dissertation focuses on both the content of and the reception of these performances and the particular implications that performances about national traumas hold for theatre critics/scholars, performance practitioners and audience members (those immediately connected and not so obviously connected to the event).

## DEDICATION

Author J.K. Rowling stated in an interview, “You will know what you believe in by what you write.” Writing this dissertation has taught me much about what I believe: the power of theatre to transform, the fragile nature of nationhood and belonging, the tremendous possibilities and ineptitudes of human beings. But it has also illuminated to me the people and places that I believe in. I dedicate this work to those people and places that have inspired me to write this dissertation. I have tried to do them justice with my research, writing, and actions along the way – if I have fallen short of this goal it is no reflection of my respect for them and the work that they have done.

I dedicate this dissertation to those who lost their lives in New York City on September 11<sup>th</sup>. I watched many of their bodies disappear into a hauntingly beautiful blue sky that fated morning. The members of September 11<sup>th</sup> Families for Peaceful Tomorrows who spoke to me for this research were invaluable to me in taking time to speak to me about their experiences on that day and beyond: Queen and her departed husband Al, Dot and Andrea.

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I hope that while this will be the end of one part of our relationship, it will be the beginning of another. To my other committee members and professors at ASU, Stephani Etheridge Woodson and Matthew Whitaker, thank you for all you have done to help guide me through this process.

Becoming a part of the TPOA program in its third year meant that my colleagues were more than fellow students, they were a family – we broke ground together, helped define what the program would become, worried for each other, cheer-leaded each other and believed together that the TPOA program is doing and will continue to do amazing things. To those with whom I shared classes, discussions, conferences and adventures – Laura, Megan, Isel, Jorge, Nestor, Tiffany, Hector, Jayson, Mary, Erica, Laurelann and Tabitha – you each have raised the bar and I truly hope that we will continue to inspire each other for years to come.

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particular thanks to Denisse, for your friendship and wisdom, you truly helped me get through it all and inspired me in many ways – vamos a cambiar el mundo!!

And to Jason Bush, who has been on this journey with me every step of the way (from choosing which PhD program to attend to how to navigate the politics and *performance* of conferences), I thank you for your words of encouragement and your wisdom – you are one of the most selfless and kind people I know.

Though my pocketbook may be small, the wealth of amazing people that I have been surrounded by in life makes me rich indeed! Heather, Coco and Di it is the greatest gift that all these years later our friendship remains and that you have been through it all with me. Ronnie, we got through NYU together and you still bring me laughter and encouragement. Victor, in the final moments, your friendship has brought me more than I could say, so I will just say thank you.

When approaching a life milestone such as attaining a PhD, one realizes that this moment stretches back with gratitude so many years and places to many people: my high school teachers who believed in me, a play that I saw when I was ten, the roommate who brought me cake when I was studying in college, all of these encounters small and large, fleeting and long-lasting, have contributed to this moment. To fully express my gratitude to all would be impossible. There are so many people who have taught me, inspired me, encouraged me, loved me and made me who I am. And so, from the humblest part of my heart and soul, I say to the Universe and all of those who have been there along the way, for all of the moments I have had thus far, and those that are to come, thank-you, hvala, gracias, merci, danke, grazie, Namaste!! Your presence is here in this work.

My parents (Mom, Dad, David and Lynda) gave me the great gift of allowing me to be me and supporting my dreams throughout my life. Mom, you will never know how much you carry me through life and how grateful I am that the Universe blessed me with someone with whom every moment from the most difficult to the most beautiful, I could share the journey with. Dad, who would have known that this PhD would bring me back to Arizona and to you, it was one of the greatest joys of this experience; I am so grateful that we had this time together and thank you for your “pearls of wisdom.”

When I was just born, my parents drove through the campus of the University of Arizona and upon seeing students walking to the library after dark, my mother said, “Well we won’t be letting her go to college.” Thank you both for protecting me in the world but never holding me back, for letting me go and encouraging me to follow my dreams, even though I’m sure as parents, it wasn’t always easy. I am proud of many things I’ve done, but to be your daughter and to come from such strong, brilliant, brave and loving people gives me pride that no one can ever take away from me. I have spent many years, as do we all, trying to figure out who I am. Now I know, when all else fades away, all titles and possessions, I am your daughter and we will always be united in this.

And finally, to Spirit, through trips and solitude, new languages and places, tears and laughter, recalled books and countless revisions, you have guided me along the way. May I always remain true to you in all that I do.



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## PREFACE

On the morning of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 I was awakened by a phone call from my former roommate, Francesca, who had since moved to Mexico City. She was calling because she knew something about what was going on within a few miles of my home that I did not yet know: that two hijacked commercial flights had been flown into the twin towers of the World Trade Center. I witnessed from my roof the two towers burning, watching mesmerized as the black smoke rose into what seemed like an impossibly blue sky. Then the black smoke turned white and I watched as the buildings imploded and exploded into the air – and with them thousands of people disappeared. I witnessed an event that was soon to change many individual lives, the landscape and daily existence as it was known in New York City, the United States of America and the world; an event that would change the politics of the world, lead to war in multiple nations, affect upcoming elections and would become a part of the U.S. cultural identity for many years to come.

During that first evening with the sound of sirens and military jets flying overhead, smoke wafting through the air and with it the smell of burned metal and bodies, many of us gathered at Union Square in Manhattan where people brought prayer candles, flowers, drew on the ground with chalk, spoke with each other, cried with each other, and stood in silence. Trauma scholar Ann Kaplan writes

I felt the togetherness especially walking around Union Square, which instantly became a huge, makeshift memorial and also a site for posting

images of people still lost. On those huge bright sunny September afternoons, the square was crowded with mourners and with people like myself needing to share in the grief and loss we all experienced, even if one had not personally lost a loved one. (12)

This space became a living memorial – changing every day with images and objects being added (often photos of the missing) and things being taken away, washing away, blowing away in the wind. The space, like performance, was ephemeral and constantly changing. Union Square served as both a site for expressions of deep sadness and concern for those who had not yet come home (addressing the present moment) and as a site for wishes of world peace (addressing the immediate and more distant future). Kaplan goes on to describe how the memorials at the Square invoked peace demonstrations of the 1960s and memorials after Princess Diana’s death: “And yet this was so different; this was personal and political in new ways. Different religions were represented. But despite all the differences in perspective that the artifacts showed, an apparent commonality reigned in the form of a respect of differences within a whole (the events) that we shared” (12).

In the weeks and months immediately after September 11th, I noticed that spaces such as Union Square which performed (in both functionary and a performance-studies senses of the word) as a space for a more “neutral” demonstration of grief, mourning and wishes for peace were being removed as the American flag and other signs of patriotism were being put up. As Taylor writes in *Archive and the Repertoire*, “Nonetheless, the show of activity made many officials nervous. Giuliani ordered the Park Service to take away the flowers,

posters, candles, and other offerings, claiming that, after the rain, they made the city look dirty. Why would tourists visit a dirty city?” (255). It is unlikely that Giuliani or other officials were truly concerned about a “dirty city” but were rather concerned with images and public performances that did not conform to the patriotic performance and response to September 11<sup>th</sup>.

Though, at the time, I did not have the theoretical framework to analyze what was taking place, I recognized that I was witnessing a process whereby grieving and mourning that advocated for peace was discouraged and replaced by an advocacy for war and revenge. Traveling outside of New York I also realized that what I had experienced that day was part of an experience that many outside the city shared. Though there were distinct differences between being physically in the space of the terrorist attack (the sights, sounds and smells are something that could not be transmitted through the television) and watching the events unfold on the news, what I had experienced as a very intimate and local trauma and tragedy, was known to many as a larger national and global trauma.

Almost three years later, in 2004, having decided to enroll in the Performance Studies program at New York University I traveled to Peru for the first time through the Hemispheric Institute (which is based at NYU). With a small group of other students I took a course that explored the connections between performance and the pursuit of justice after the Peruvian Dirty War, a topic that I knew nothing about before arriving there. During the course we spent time with members of the Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission who spoke with us about their process, mostly during their Public Testimonies. We

went to see art exhibits that addressed the Dirty War, including the photo installation, Yuyanapaq, containing graphic images of the violence that had occurred during the war. Having gained some background on what had happened in the time period between 1980-2000, we then began participating in workshops with the performance troupe, Grupo Cultural Yuyachkani. In addition to learning theatrical skill sets from the group including maskwork and voicework, we watched performances such as *Rosa Cuchillo* and *Antigona* that the group created in response to the events of the war. Though my first visit to Peru was brief, I the experience left me wanting to learn more about the place and the people I met there.

Meeting members of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Yuyachkani gave me the vocabulary and framework to revisit and rethink my own observations and experiences after September 11<sup>th</sup>. I was particularly struck by the differences in the treatment of grief and mourning between the two sites as well as the difference in the use of art to address these traumatic events. Whereas the Truth and Reconciliation Commission attempted to incorporate the sadness and mourning that took place at a national level by the end of the Dirty War, it was apparent in its format and final conclusions that the 9/11 Commission would not do the same. Furthermore, the relationship between the Commission and Yuyachkani, and the use of performance to fortify the goals of the public testimonies was something that I believed we would never see in the United States, at least not on such a large scale. I began to ask myself how varying definitions of nation and nationhood as well as differences in cultural

understandings of grief and mourning effect the treatment of large-scale traumatic events at a national level. This was the question that led to my final project at NYU, a comparison between public performances of grief and mourning after September 11<sup>th</sup> in the U.S., and the Dirty War in Peru.

In 2005, while working for the Hemispheric Institute on the digital archive of Yuyachkani, Hurricane Katrina began its approach towards New Orleans. I don't recall the exact moment that I found out about the storm. Located in Lima at the time, my access to U.S. American news was limited to my trips to the local internet café to check the internet and information I received on the local Peruvian news channel. As events unfolded, I happened to leave Lima for a trip down Peru's coast into Bolivia. I took advantage of my hotel stays to watch CNN and found myself simultaneously transfixed and mortified by what I was seeing. Being "on the other side of the world" from the United States, I felt very helpless and frustrated by my reliance on the media to explain to me what was taking place in "my country", not that I would have been watching a different CNN had I been back at home in New York – but somehow it didn't feel the same. I felt helpless in a way that I had not experienced since I stood on my roof and watched the World Trade Center towers collapse, but in that case I was able to walk up to Ground Zero and see for myself what was going on. Many Peruvians came up to me and asked, with no obvious intentions of being critical but out of genuine bafflement, how this could happen in a first world nation such as the United States. By "this" they didn't mean a hurricane but rather they were perplexed as to how one of the richest most powerful nations in the world could allow people

to sit on their roofs, baking in the sun – the image that we were beginning to see most consistently on the news.

Because of Yuyachkani's involvement tackling difficult social topics in their work, and my own research during the previous years, I was curious whether theater would play a role in the rebuilding process of New Orleans and in the construction of a narrative about Hurricane Katrina, and if so, how. Two years later and back in the United States, I still found myself in the quest to understand what happened in the Gulf region in late August, 2005 and to investigate how theater was being utilized to respond to the events of Hurricane Katrina. This quest led me on a last-minute and completely inconvenient trip to New Orleans to see a production of a newly written play, *The Breach*. The play, I hoped, would help me answer some of my questions. Both the play itself, and the relationship I began to form with the city and the people I met there, inspired me to incorporate Hurricane Katrina into my work on trauma and performance.

It was this addition of a third site, New Orleans, which began to shape the previous research I had done on September 11<sup>th</sup> and the Peruvian Dirty War into the project that is now developed into this dissertation. By placing these events, places and performances in dialogue with each other, I was able to identify the throughline of this work: how traumas that impact large communities put into question the nature of national cohesion and belonging, and how performances responding to these events illuminate the specific implications of traumatic events that may be defined as national traumas.



Each of these experiences, beginning with my own very personal relationship to September 11<sup>th</sup>, inspired and guided the questions and research that have been challenging me for nearly ten years. Rather than asking a question and then finding the performances or historical moments that I felt would answer those questions, it was performances and historical moments that generated the questions that only time and deeper analysis would answer. If the primary goal post-trauma is to heal and recover, then I cannot help to feel that the journey I have taken and the process of writing this dissertation has been my own attempt to grapple with and recover from the trauma that I experienced on September 11<sup>th</sup>.

## Introduction

In *Sociodrama and Collective Trauma* Peter Kellermann writes, “The word *trauma* was originally used as a surgical concept, indicating a breaking point of body tissue. It later became a useful metaphor for a psychological breaking point in the lives of people who experienced great misfortune outside the range of ordinary human experience” (41). Traumatic events disrupt a way of being, causing physical and/or psychological ruptures that their survivors are left to recover from. They can be personal, experienced by an individual, or collective, experienced by a group of individuals such as a family. Others, like the bombing of Hiroshima, affect much larger communities such as an entire town, nation, or even the world. These national traumas often include large-scale death or injury and forever alter the lives of thousands. In addition to their immediate physical and material effects (mortalities, economic impact, creating a need for aid), these events shatter not only an individual’s sense of well-being, but also larger notions of national identity, stability and security. In many cases they also reveal the limits of prevailing and problematic concepts of national cohesiveness, citizenship and belonging, while often simultaneously upholding or reconstructing newly problematic concepts of national cohesion. While psychoanalysis and most scholarship focuses on trauma as an individual’s event, and some focuses on collective trauma, in this dissertation I look at national traumas as a distinct type of trauma that has yet to be fully explored in either trauma studies or performance studies.

*In National Trauma and Collective Memory: Major Events in the American Century*, Arthur G. Neal writes, “A national trauma differs from a personal trauma in the sense that it is shared with others [. . .] a national trauma is shared collectively and frequently has a cohesive effect as individuals gather in small and intimate groups to reflect on the tragedy and its consequences” (4). While such traumas certainly impact individuals, they are from the moment of their occurrence (or more precisely, their entry into public awareness), understood as a large-scale event that impacts many people beyond the immediate “given” victims. For example, the attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup> victimized those most directly involved (those who died that day, and the families and loved ones of the deceased), but they were always intended and understood as an attack against the United States, not solely (if even at all) against those individuals. To the terrorists, the Twin Towers stood in for the U.S. and as a symbol of capitalism. The nearly 3,000 individuals who died that day stood-in for all U.S. Americans.

Traumas are documented and grappled with through various media including literature, poetry, art, photography, and journalism. In this dissertation I examine how theatre and performance are utilized by artists to respond to, document, memorialize and represent national traumas resulting from such historical crises as the Peruvian Dirty Wars, Hurricane Katrina, and September 11<sup>th</sup>, as well as how they resist dominant narratives that construct national traumas as such. These traumas are relived and expressed through performance perhaps precisely because the members of a nation (consciously or subconsciously) recognize that the nation is also performed. I focus on both the

content and reception of these performances and the particular implications that performances about national traumas hold for theatre critics/scholars, performance practitioners and audience members (those immediately connected and not so obviously connected to the event).

In this dissertation I primarily draw on the discipline of performance studies which takes performance both as an object of analysis (theatrical plays and other forms that are understood to be performances) and as a lens to examine social practices more commonly considered outside the realm of performance. I include objects of analysis such as parades, memorials, and public hearings, and other events which contribute to the social construction of nation and nationhood, and interpret them as performance. Applying a performance studies lens allows these traumatic events to be interpreted as public spectacles, meant to be viewed by an audience. This also connects the more traditionally defined performances, such as plays, with these other public “acts.” I also draw on performance studies’ inherent interdisciplinarity, understanding that “the differences among cultures are so profound that no theory of performance is universal: one size cannot fit all” (Schechner 2).

While performance studies scholars including Peggy Phelan and Diana Taylor have examined traumas which are national, they have not engaged with the specific nature and implications of national traumas as such. This dissertation draws upon these scholars and makes a new contribution to the field by specifically examining how national traumas are constructed as traumas, how they contribute to the performance of nation, and how they illuminate prevailing

perceptions of nation and nationhood and the limits or fault lines of those perceptions. Among other topics, this dissertation will focus on how national traumas are created by agencies including the media and the government; how they alter social perceptions of national cohesion and belonging; how they expose discrepancies between the idea of the nation and the implementation of those idea/s; how these traumas are performed; how theater and performance interacts with traumatic events; how critics/scholars ethically write about performances that represent and/or respond to national trauma; what happens when performance responding to trauma of a particular time and place is performed outside of its original context; and how these traveling performances challenge notions of where the traumas “begin and end.”

One key focus of this dissertation is how performances related to national trauma and crisis engage with the larger performances of nation itself. I am particularly interested in how these performances make visible what is often invisible in the national scenario as it “normally” and “naturally” plays itself out: who is understood to be part of the nation and who is considered Other, as well as what rights and privileges are understood to be a given within those constructs. These events are a part of the evolving process of constructing nation, becoming a critical part of the nation’s historical narrative.

In addition to connecting national traumas and performance, the dissertation will also make a contribution to these fields by looking at case studies which have not been thoroughly explored. Though September 11<sup>th</sup> has been written about in terms of both its implications as a national trauma and there are

multiple studies on performances addressing September 11<sup>th</sup>, in this dissertation I will look at two performances that have not received scholarly attention and will also focus on people who, because of their identities and beliefs, were rendered invisible within larger social performances after September 11<sup>th</sup>. Since Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast region in 2005, critical attention has focused on various aspects of the storm and responses to the storm; however, little has been written about the performances that address the storm and its aftermath. This dissertation will provide a necessary contribution to what will likely be a growing concentration in performance studies scholarship on post-Katrina performance. Grupo Cultural Yuyachkani, one of the primary case studies of the dissertation, has been written about by multiple scholars including Diana Taylor, Francine A’Ness and Jill Lane. Performances responding to the Dirty War in Argentina, the Holocaust and Apartheid South Africa have also received scholarly attention, both in books and journal articles. However, these studies do not specifically focus on national traumas as a theoretical site of study, nor do they examine how the performances engage with larger performances of nationhood.

## **Trauma**

Freud’s theories and concepts of trauma are almost always referred to by current trauma scholars. His work is often engaged with as *the* foundational work on trauma from an individual, psychological perspective. Freud was concerned with the “repetitive reenactments of people who have experienced painful events” (Caruth 2). These people, Freud observed, repeated the wounds of their trauma

against themselves or against others, because the trauma, a wound which happens not only to the body but to the mind, creates a “breach in the mind’s experience of time, self, and the world – [it] is not, like the wound of the body, a simple and healable event, but rather an event that [. . .] is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly” to be processed consciously, and is therefore repeated unconsciously again and again (Caruth 3-4). For Freud, the traumatic event was an event that needed to be confronted and eventually recovered from. Within Western psychological discourse, heavily influenced by Freud, the effects of trauma are considered to be similar to a disease that must be cured.

Cathy Caruth’s work on trauma, which refers to and builds on Freud’s theories, has also been substantial and foundational within trauma studies. Her work, which combines psychoanalysis with literary studies, is often referred to by performance studies scholars examining performance and trauma. In her book, *Unclaimed Experience :Trauma, Narrative, and History*, Caruth examines trauma in literature. She writes, “If Freud turns to literature to describe traumatic experience, it is because literature, like psychoanalysis, is interested in the complex relation between knowing and not knowing” (3). Caruth is interested in literary expressions of trauma and how these examples demonstrate that an individual’s experience of trauma is always “tied up with the trauma of another” (8). Thus, trauma is almost always a social, if not collective, concern. In this dissertation I extend Caruth’s insights on the social nature of trauma into a consideration of traumas of a much larger scale (experienced both at the individual and collective level). In Peter Kellermann’s *Sociodrama and*

*Collective Trauma*, trauma is also understood as a collective event: “Major traumatic events, such as war, terrorist bombings, and natural disasters, transcend the realms of individual suffering and enter the universal and collective sphere”

(9). Though it could be argued that there is no individual suffering since all individuals are part of at least some social community, I examine traumas that are collective from the outset, impacting thousands of people from the moment of their occurrence and long afterwards.

Trauma studies is a relatively new but rapidly emerging field that provides concrete terminology to analyze the effects of traumatic events on society.

Trauma studies, like performance studies, is an interdisciplinary field which draws on psychology, sociology and other fields. The study of trauma in the United States is closely linked with the recognition that soldiers after World War II and the Vietnam War were suffering from what was eventually defined as Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome. An increased interest in a post-Holocaust society and its survivors was also foundational in the way in which trauma was interpreted within the field. Though national traumas including the Holocaust and the Vietnam War are often the central points of focus in trauma studies analysis, the implications of those traumas in terms of the nation are often omitted.

Furthermore, trauma studies as a field is just beginning to acknowledge race and class as fundamental markers of experienced trauma. In addition, as a field it is heavily based in western theory and philosophy. In the introduction to their book *World Memory: Personal Trajectories in Global Trauma*, authors Jill



Bennett and Rosanne Kennedy ask, “Given its Euro-American origins, can trauma studies provide a rubric for understanding the effects of the Stolen Generations, of Apartheid, and of other traumatic events such as those of migration, political violence, war, racism, and violence?” (4). This book does address how geography and culture effects approaches to trauma; however, the majority of scholarship addressing trauma is filtered through a European, psychoanalytical perspective. Since a substantial literature that is not based on western philosophers including Freud has yet to be produced, in my own research for this dissertation it has been difficult to escape this problem, particularly since my case studies include populations that do not easily fit into the designation “Western.”

### **Constructing Nation(al Trauma)**

Drawing on the performance studies assertion that there is an underlying dimension of performance in virtually every aspect of everyday life, this dissertation understands nation and nationhood as a construct which requires repetitive performances to achieve intelligibility at all. As theatre scholar E.J. Westlake describes it (following from Anderson and Bhabha),

To understand the ways the nation is performed it is necessary to understand the way the nation is constructed . . . The nation is not real, nor is it imaginary. The nation resides somewhere between the fact and construct, somewhere between the physical geography and the concept agreed upon by the people who count themselves as citizens. (22, 25)

There are of course more tangible “objects” for lack of a better term that establish nations: government buildings such as the Capitol, police, border checks, passports, flags, etc. However, these all function as part of a larger performance

of nation, they have meaning because they are given meaning; they are props in the larger drama of nation, *performing* a function. There is also an idea of nation that the inhabitants of the nation are meant to believe in, a sense of cohesiveness and belonging.

National traumas are generally understood to destabilize fundamental “every day” mechanisms of the nation: “The disruption may take the form of a threat of foreign invasion, a collapse of the economic system, a technological catastrophe, or the emergence of rancorous conflicts over values, practices, and priorities” (Neal 5). While traumas disrupt a sense of nation, they simultaneously create new definitions of nationhood and confirm pre-existing concepts of nationhood. Neal writes,

In the social heritage of the nation, traumas are drawn upon in shaping collective identities, in setting national priorities, and in providing guidelines for what to do or not to do in any given case. . . We negotiate between the past and the future through our concern about historical repetitions. . . such perceptions provide a close link between self-identity and national identity. (37)

In other words, traumatic national moments are a key transitional element in a person’s identity formation between seeing oneself as an individual “free-agent” and seeing oneself as a member of the nation state. Some scholars have gone so far as to say that nations such as the United States are nations of trauma (Cvektovich 36).

Returning to the concept of trauma as a tear in the skin (Kellermann 41), a national trauma can be understood to be the tearing of the metaphorical skin of the nation, the skin being a sense of boundaries, borders and communities that the

nation's inhabitants must believe in if they are to believe in the concept of nation. Neal writes, "Under conditions of national trauma, the borders and boundaries between order and chaos, between the sacred and the profane, between good and evil, between life and death become fragile" (5). In the case of a terrorist attack such as what occurred on September 11<sup>th</sup>, borders between good and evil not only collapse, but physical and geographical borders lose their perceived permanence and ability to keep the nation safe. After September 11<sup>th</sup>, "keeping borders safe" became a new cultural obsession within the United States, the effects of which can still be seen nearly a decade later when those arguing for increased border security between the United States and Mexico point to the terrorist attacks as a primary reason to increase border securities (though the Mexico/U.S. border was not crossed by any of the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorists). National traumas therefore extend beyond their immediate impact on individuals or the communities that are affected by the events, challenging the very notion of the nation as a stable, fixed, non-porous entity; those geographically distanced from the event, for example, those who were not in New York City, Pennsylvania or Washington D.C. during the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks, were impacted by the attacks because they were understood to be attacks against the nation and to threaten the physical (and emotional) security of those within the nation. Anyone who understood themselves to be part of the nation could have felt personally attacked that day.

While often traumatic events are quantified by the level of devastation that is produced during the event (the number of deaths, the geographic scope of the event, etc.), this may or may not influence whether the event is considered to be a

national trauma or not. In *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* Jeffrey C.

Alexander argues, “First and foremost, we maintain that events do not, in and of themselves, create collective trauma. Events are not inherently traumatic.

Trauma is a socially mediated attribution” (Alexander 8). He goes on to say,

‘Experiencing trauma’ can be understood as a sociological process that defines a painful injury to the collectivity, establishes the victim, attributes responsibility, and distributes the ideal and material consequences. Insofar as traumas are so experienced, and thus imagined and represented, the collective identity will become significantly revised. (Alexander 22)

National traumas are not only experienced collectively, but one’s underlying understanding of national traumas is also greatly shaped by the societies in which they take place. Neal points out that, “While the responses of individuals to national traumas are highly varied, collective responses tend to become standardized through the elaboration of myths and legends for defining the moral boundaries of society” (Neal 21). There are a number of agencies that establish an event as a national trauma including, but not limited to, the government and the media.

National traumas can build communities, increase patriotism, and strengthen a sense of unity and nationhood. Those who were both close to the trauma (geographically or via relationships) and those distanced from the trauma might find themselves refueled with a sense of patriotism: they might volunteer for the army, feel closer to strangers who share the common “bond” of the event, join support organizations, etc.. While national traumas can build communities they can also have the opposite effect (Neal 31). In cases such as the Dirty War in Peru, which I will discuss in Chapter Five, the trauma was in fact created by pre-

existing fragmentations within society. After the war ended, the Peruvian government and other agencies including the Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission attempted to use the lessons learned through the traumatic event to unite the country and re-establish who was considered to be a Peruvian citizen.

Though September 11<sup>th</sup> impacted people within the country and around the world of many races, religions and political views, public response to September 11<sup>th</sup> became quickly dominated by a narrow perception of what patriotism and loyalty to the United States looked and sounded like. Those who existed outside of this definition of an ideal citizen were silenced by dominant rhetoric conflating September 11<sup>th</sup> with a need to go to war and an increasing mistrust of the Arab communities of the United States. This type of reaction is typical in a post-traumatized society. For example, after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, there was wide-spread fear and distrust of Japanese Americans and an increased rhetoric of racism (Neal 5). This collective anger and fear translated into the physical internment of over 110,000 Japanese-Americans and Japanese in the United States. Though these members of U.S. society were also affected by the attacks against Pearl Harbor, they were considered outsiders and therefore were actually punished for the traumatic event, rather than being perceived as fellow victims of the attack. The attack on Pearl Harbor is often given as an example of a national trauma because it involved a military attack, destabilized notions of security, created social ramifications (the internment camps) and led to further national actions (the bombing of Japan). The creation of the camps is typically categorized as a cultural trauma.

Just as the acknowledgement of a trauma as a national and/or cultural trauma shapes nationhood, so too does the denial or dismissal of an event. For example, in the United States, there is still a struggle to acknowledge on a deep and profound level the trauma of slavery. Another generally neglected trauma is that suffered by Native Americans who, like Afro and Afro-Caribbean slaves were slaughtered and displaced and face the cultural and social remainders and reminders of those traumas today. Ann Cvektovich writes,

It is also the case that constructing the history of the United States from the vantage point of trauma produces a critical American studies, one that revises a celebratory account of the nation and instead illuminates its emergence from a history that includes capitalism and economic exploitation, war, colonialism and the genocide of native peoples, and slavery, diaspora, and migration. This version of American studies converges with transnational approaches to the United States, making it possible to explore the tenuous borders (both literal and ideological) of the United States as a nation along with the violences that sustain, defend, and/or expand its borders. (36)

This quote illuminates the political nature and implications of defining an event as a national trauma, labeling it as something else, or ignoring it all together on a theoretical and critical level.

Often traumas which are eventually framed as national traumas have to threaten the “ideal” citizen of that nation; in the case of the United States that citizen is white, heterosexual, and middle to upper class. This also helps illustrate the difference between cultural and national traumas. While September 11<sup>th</sup> is considered to be a national trauma (because it impacted the “ideal citizen” and because it also was an act of war), the history of slavery is socially understood as a cultural trauma. Therefore, national traumas as they are constructed, illuminate

*whose* nation is being discussed when an event is deemed a national trauma. As Westlake notes, “Citizens view the nation in terms of what or who lies within the nation, as well as what or who lies without” (26). This construction of nation can place people *outside* of the nation, even though they reside *within* the nation (the poor, brown, unhealthy, etc). The liminal status of Hurricane Katrina as I will later discuss shows how race, class and location often determines whether an event is deemed a cultural or national trauma.

### **Performing Trauma**

National traumas, like the concept of nation, can be understood as *performed* events. Via the media and other popular story-tellers, the national and public “audience” comes to understand what has taken place. As I will discuss in my chapter about Hurricane Katrina, public figures such as CNN’s Anderson Cooper can be understood as a narrator, a story-teller who enters into people’s living rooms to tell us the latest story. Events are categorized as important because of the very fact that they are on the news; an event becomes a disaster because Anderson Cooper says it is; we should care about and have empathy for the victims of an event because Anderson Cooper (or whoever the newscaster happens to be) says we should. National traumas are also like many dramas (based on the Aristotelian model) because they include a dramatic moment, a rise in action, and ultimately seek some type of resolution. The usage of terms such as “the most dramatic event” demonstrate the ways in which traumatic events, including national traumas, are presented in similar ways to many theatrical

events: they are only performed on a much larger stage, the national stage, and on a much larger scale.

If national traumas can be understood as performed events, then it is important to look at the performances that respond to these events. Although Caruth embraces literature and Kellerman sociodrama as viable sites for responding to trauma, the notion of doing so through art has been a contentious topic in critical discourse, particularly since social and artistic critic Theodor Adorno declared that to write lyrical poetry (with many respondents interpreting that as making any art) after Auschwitz was barbaric.<sup>1</sup> Trauma elicits unique questions about the limitations, implications and ethics of using art to respond to trauma: how can a single image, poem or play encapsulate the immense horrors of the traumatic event?; how can art represent trauma without diminishing the gravity of the event (as the arts are often considered to be for people's enjoyment)? In *Mourning Sex*, Peggy Phelan addresses what makes theatre unique as an art form and why that matters to understanding its relation to trauma. For Phelan, theatre and performance are "predicated on their own disappearance" (2), an ontological claim based on the ephemerality and unrepeatability of this live form. According to Phelan, the unrepeatability of performance mirrors the unrepeatability of trauma. She goes on to say,

Psychoanalysis gives us the idea that trauma is simultaneously untouchable and remarkably unattached to, untouching of, what surrounds it. Often trauma is not recognized until well after it has happened, in part because it is a complete, contained event. . . .When I say trauma is untouchable, I mean that it cannot be represented. The symbolic cannot carry it: trauma makes a tear in the symbolic order itself. (Phelan 5)

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<sup>1</sup> I will further address this in the conclusion of the dissertation.



For Diana Taylor (who draws from Joseph Roach's theories in *Cities of the Dead: The Circum Atlantic Performance*), performance has the ability to retain and transmit vital knowledge: "Embodied expression has participated and will probably continue to participate in the transmission of social knowledge, memory, and identity pre- and postwriting" (*Archive* 16). The stakes of thinking about performance both as an act of disappearance and as transmitting memory are high; "Debates about 'ephemerality' of performance are, of course, profoundly political. Whose memories, traditions, and claims to history disappear if performance practices lack the staying power to transmit vital knowledge?" (Taylor *Archive* 5). While I agree with Phelan's argument that theatre is ephemeral, like Roach and Taylor, I am less concerned with performance's inherent loss, and am more interested in the trace performances leave behind, what performances make apparent or make re-appear even through their process of disappearance. Taylor refers to this as *hauntology* (which she takes from Derrida); "The way I see it, performance makes visible (for an instant, live, now) that which is always already there: the ghosts, the tropes, the scenarios that structure our individual and collective life" (*Archive* 143).

In this dissertation I consider both theatrical performances and other public acts for their particular and unique contributions to a society's response to national traumas. Such performances – plays, parades, protests - differ in form and impact from other producers of knowledge including, but not limited to, the media.

The performances that I address in this dissertation do not try to directly represent the traumatic events they address. The aftermath of the events, the haunting and ghosts of the events themselves and those who were disappeared by those events, are represented in these performances. The cultural and historical scenarios that Taylor describes play a critical role in national traumas since these events do not simply emerge out of a vacuum. Traumatic events and national traumas in particular, are perceived as a disruption of the “every day” and the “normal” routines and construction of that nation. However, in fact, they are often the direct results of long-standing practices and events: September 11<sup>th</sup> can be seen as the result, among other things, of a history of U.S. involvement in Afghanistan; Hurricane Katrina and the treatment of its victims the result of neglect and racism; and the Peruvian Dirty War of poverty and racism. Upon closer examination, these underlying scenarios are illuminated by national traumas. Perhaps because, as Taylor notes, performance is often concerned with depicting these scenarios, it is often performances that point to these scenarios as they pertain to national traumas.

As I have already discussed, traumas are constructed socially by agencies that create narratives about the event; these narratives then get folded into the larger historical narratives about the country. For example, the media presented one narrative of Katrina which included a negative image of New Orleans, especially of its black population. The media’s portrayal of Hurricane Katrina might have varied drastically from the experience of those in New Orleans, creating a gap of knowledge between those on the inside and those on the outside

of New Orleans. Theatre can help fill in these gaps and can help highlight the voices of these communities. Ann Cvektovich writes, “Events are claimed as national trauma only through cultural and political work. This production of a public culture frequently privileges some experiences and excludes others. . .” (37). She goes on to say, “Public recognition of traumatic experience has often been achieved only through cultural struggle. . .” (160). Though Cvektovich is specifically addressing the specific struggle to recognize the trauma of HIV and AIDS in the United States because of its status as a “queer” disease, this cultural struggle to recognize a traumatic experience can easily be applied to the experience of many in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina.

Theatre and performance are participants in this cultural struggle for recognition. Though not as wide-scale as other knowledge-producing agencies such as the media, theatre and other forms of art do help formulate people’s perceptions and understanding of events. Describing the role of literature in forming a population’s understanding of trauma, Jeffrey Alexander writes,

Social narratives are not composed by some hidden hand of history. Nor do they appear all at once. The new trauma drama emerged in bits and pieces. It was a matter of this story and that, this scene and that scene from this movie and that book, this television episode and that theater performance, this photographic capturing of a moment of torture and suffering. (231)

Patricia Leavy states something similar, “The ways that iconic events appear in popular culture impacts the public’s understanding of the event, keeps the event in the public domain thus transmitting versions of the event across generations, and normalizing its national significance while renegotiating national identity” (26).

Theatre and its portrayal of history can and often does present an alternative narrative to the ones presented by the media and other hegemonic agencies. In this way, audiences may learn something about an event by watching a performance that contradicts the dominant narratives created about the traumatic event.

In his book, *Past Performance: American Theatre and the Historical Imagination* Roger Bechtel examines theater's relationship to representing the past. According to Bechtel, history plays can be used to "interrogate history – the idea of history, its uses and abuses, as Nietzsche would have it, rather than its facets alone – and our relation to it" (16). His work is useful for this project since he directly examines historical events portrayed on stage. National traumas are ongoing and as Smelser points out, "...once a historical memory is established as a national trauma for which the society has to be held in some way responsible, its status as trauma has to be continuously and actively sustained and reproduced in order to continue in that status" (38). Performance, as theater practitioners including Brecht point out in their theories and plays, can expose this process. Bechtel discusses specific elements of theatre which make it useful in engaging with history as a concept and not just a fixed narrative: the ephemeral nature of performance reflects the ephemeral and non-fixed nature of history and memory, and the embodied presence of the actor which "mimic[s] the energy of the original historical event, mak[es] theatre a uniquely privileged site for 'performing history'" (26). I find Bechtel's hypothesis useful to my work since

he helps to answer one of the driving questions of my research, what theatre can do after a traumatic event that other modes of information-transfer cannot.

Bechtel acknowledges that there may be one “accepted” hegemonic historical narrative but that there may also be what he calls counter histories

[. . .] which “resist or refute hegemonic historical narratives. . . These counter histories, of course, can offer no more ‘truth’ than their hegemonic predecessors but they can advance our historical knowledge – and its uses – by mapping a terrain much more complicated and heterogeneous than our received histories have acknowledged. (42)

Theatre offers the opportunity to present these counterhistories, which can then “rescue historical consciousness from cultural oblivion. . .” (Bechtel 18).

In his keynote at the Traumatic Structures conference at Arizona State University, Maurice Stevens described trauma as a productive phenomenon. National traumas are productive in that they help continue the production of the idea of nation, setting new definitions or reaffirming pre-existing definitions and constructions of nation and nationhood. Further, traumas are productive from both metaphorical and material perspectives. After September 11<sup>th</sup>, material items including postcards, t-shirts, tours to the World Trade Center Site, etc., were sold to the public so that they could buy a “piece” of the trauma; the creation and production of art, including performance, after traumatic events can be seen as participants in the productive response to these events. However, some performances such as those that I examine in the dissertation simultaneously participate and intervene in this production “machine.”

## **Approaches to This Study**

In this dissertation, I include interviews with playwrights, artists and others involved in the performances I describe. In most cases, I have tried to see the performances featured most prominently in the dissertation. I have chosen the plays that I examine in the dissertation because their content and/or context speak to the theme of national trauma. Seeing these performances and getting to know the people involved with them inspired the foci of the chapters of the dissertation (as opposed to having predetermined chapter subjects and then cherry-picking performances that fit into them). In the instances in which I have not seen the performance live, I utilize archival materials, when possible, to visualize the performance as much as possible. There are many performances not represented in the dissertation that I'm sure would also illuminate the distinctions of national traumas. Their omission does not indicate that I think that they are less relevant to the topic of national traumas. The topic of performance and national traumas could go in many directions and there are many things that I would have liked to explore in this dissertation and perhaps will explore in the future. I hope that other scholars will also examine national traumas as a distinct type of trauma deserving of critical and theoretical attention.

Though this dissertation examines multiple examples of national traumas that took place in very different cities, countries and cultures, I do not want to imply that these incidents were the same in scope or nature. Each of these events took place for very different reasons, under very different circumstances, and they continue to have differing implications and ramifications within the nations and

cultures in which they took place. However, by placing these events in dialogue with each other, I believe we can discover even more about these events and the role of performance in the ways they have been understood. In other words, what distinguishes them from each other tells us something about them that looking at them independently might omit. There are also some similarities between the events which tell us more about them as distinct events in addition to indicating some definable qualities of national traumas.

### **Chapter One: “Critical Generosity” Writing About Performance Addressing Trauma**

In this chapter I will draw on scholars including Sonja Kuftinec, Jill Dolan and David Román to address the particular challenge of writing about performances that address events such as national traumas. Because the circumstances that inspire these performances are so horrific, it can be difficult to be objectively critical of the performances and their creators. However, combining the critical generosity that Dolan and Román describe in their work with a healthy awareness of the limitations of such performances, I attempt to address the intentions of the performances’ creators to create awareness of and compassion for the victims of these events, while at the same time maintaining the rigor and objectivity required of such scholarship.

### **Chapter Two: “Ideal Citizens” Performance after September 11th**

The events that took place September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 (henceforth to be called September 11<sup>th</sup>)<sup>2</sup> fits the criteria of a national trauma as a “textbook case.” There were terrorist attacks from one nation (or, in this case, a terrorist organization located outside of the U.S.) against the United States, the death-toll of the day was in the thousands, and the very sense of the nation’s stability and safety was immediately compromised. In this chapter I will discuss how and why September 11<sup>th</sup> was constructed as a national trauma. I will look at the aftermath of those events, most notably the government’s decision to invade Iraq and Afghanistan, as part of the performed reaction to national traumas. I will also look at the performance of patriotism and national cohesiveness that took place in such strong visible public performances, from the waving of the American flag to rhetoric that dominated the discourse surrounding the events. Though many were brought together by those events, and some found a new sense of patriotism and loyalty to their nation, there were many who, because of their personal, religious and political beliefs, did not fit into the dominant narratives and discourse surrounding September 11<sup>th</sup>.

I will look at two performances as primary examples of such (mis)performed reactions to September 11<sup>th</sup>. The actions of the group Families of Victims of September 11<sup>th</sup>, specifically that of Stonewalk, during which a two-ton stone was pulled from Boston to New York (following the path of the hijacked planes that were flown into the twin towers), directly contradicted the rhetoric that

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<sup>2</sup> I would like to note that the term September 11<sup>th</sup> has more than one resonance in the Western Hemisphere, most notably in Chile, where on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 1973 where Pinochet overthrew the then President Allende through a violent coup d’etat. However, in this dissertation, the term September 11<sup>th</sup> will refer to the events that took place September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 in the United States.



conflated the victims of September 11<sup>th</sup> with the pro-war agenda. These families and loved ones of the September 11<sup>th</sup> victims had lost someone very dear to them that day, but because they did not conform to the larger national performance taking place after September 11<sup>th</sup>, because they went “off script”, their voices were largely silenced and in some cases they were confronted by people who accused them of being non-patriots, no better than terrorists themselves.

The second performance I examine, *The Patriot Act*, was created by two New York residents, who because of their beliefs and because of their status as non-ideal citizens (one is Arab, the other gay), were not included in the larger performed reaction to September 11<sup>th</sup>. The Patriot Act, a piece of legislation that would drastically alter the government’s ability to monitor its citizens and their actions was, through dominant narrative, conflated with and justified by the attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>. In this performance Toni Silver and Joseph Shahadi reclaim their city (New York) and their nation (the United States), questioning the (mis)use of September 11<sup>th</sup>, an event that changed both of their lives, to garner support for The Patriot Act.

Both of these performances become performance of resistance and redefining citizenship by virtue of the fact that they resist dominant narratives, largely created by the government, that conflated citizenship and patriotism, September 11<sup>th</sup> and support of the attacks against Iraq and Afghanistan, and finally, The Patriot Act.

### **Chapter Three: Hurricane Katrina, *The Breach* and Mardi Gras**

I include Hurricane Katrina in this dissertation specifically because its status as either cultural or national trauma is yet to be determined. There are a few factors that contribute to its liminal status. The first is that part of the trauma was caused by a natural event, the storm itself and natural events are often considered outside the scope of a national trauma. However, many would argue that the main cause of the trauma was created by mankind not by nature, faulting the neglect that led to the breach of the levees, the disastrous response or lack thereof of governmental agencies after the storm, and the treatment of the people of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast as less than citizens. I am also interested in the events surrounding Hurricane Katrina because they are highly racialized. The race and financial status of the majority of Katrina's victims made them invisible on the national stage; because they were not "ideal" citizens before Hurricane Katrina, their treatment during and after the storm was greatly influenced by this status. Their status as what philosopher Henry Giroux would call "disposable bodies" factored into the justification of the fact that those bodies were left on rooftops to die of heat and thirst and other inhumane conditions.

In this chapter I look at *The Breach*, a play created by three playwrights inspired by their "outsider" status and what they saw on television about Katrina and the people of New Orleans. I follow most closely a plotline in which a journalist is confronted with his own pre-conceived notions about Katrina by residents of New Orleans who are nothing less than infuriated by how they have been portrayed by the media. I look at the media as a primary contributor to dominant narratives that construct how people will come to understand traumas.

I perform a close-reading of some of the primary stories and myths surrounding New Orleans, in particular regards to the black population that was portrayed as barbaric and animalistic. I analyze how this contributed to the status of these people as disposable and how in some cases it even delayed aid to those who needed immediate help and assistance. *The Breach* is then framed as a direct contradiction to the dominant narratives that emerged in the media after Hurricane Katrina and I further analyze what performance can do in terms of invoking empathy that the news perhaps cannot.

I also look at the first Mardi Gras after Katrina as a primary site where people performed resistance to dominant perceptions about Katrina. While many questioned in the media the appropriateness of holding an event like Mardi Gras while the city was still in the process of recovery, I argue that in a city where performance and ritual is so primary to people's identity, there was no option *but* to hold Mardi Gras. I also argue that the opportunity to reclaim their identities and perform resistance, pain and grief is a vital part of the healing and recovery process, just as important as rebuilding homes and stimulating the local economy.

#### **Chapter Four: Memory, Performance and Nation: The Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Grupo Cultural Yuyachkani**

During a period of two decades, at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, nearly 70,000 Peruvians were killed by guerilla terrorist organizations (most famously the Shining Path) and the Peruvian military. Like those who were affected by Hurricane Katrina, the victims of the violence in Peru, mostly indigenous, were largely ignored and treated as non-citizens of Peru long before the violence of that

war took place. Many cultural anthropologists, legal experts and others in Peru have argued that the large social fractures of Peru - the division between those considered part of the nation and those who were not – largely contributed to how and why the violence took place. As in the other case-studies of the dissertation, larger concepts of ideal citizenship played a role in the events leading up to, during, and after the traumatic event.

After the capture of the Shining Path's leader, Abimael Guzmán, and a shift in political power took place, a Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission was formed. The Peruvian TRC conducted public hearings/testimonies throughout the regions of Peru that were most devastated by the war. In the larger context of this dissertation, I examine the role Truth and Reconciliation Commissions have in uncovering and exposing narratives (or truths) which were largely covered up and ignored during periods of violence, and yet still construct new, dominant narratives about the period of violence which then become fixed and difficult to contest. I also examine the role performance played in the implementation of the TRC's public testimonies.

Grupo Cultural Yuyachkani, a theater collective that has been working in Peru with indigenous communities and creating politically engaged performances for forty years, accompanied the TRC during the public testimonies. After this process they came back to the Peruvian capitol of Lima, where they are based, and created the play *Sin Título*. In many ways this play engages with the healing attributes and contradictions of the work of the TRC. I am interested in how this

performance, which was performed for audiences that were mainly not directly connected to the war, supplemented the work of the TRC.

## **Conclusion**

In my conclusion I briefly review the major points of the dissertation and open them up to themes and theories that I would like to explore in the future. Thinking about the implications of performances that address a traumatic event in a specific time and place that are then performed outside of that time and place, I look at the possible affects and effects of performances that address national trauma: their abilities to create empathy, to inspire actions, and to create a larger sense of global citizenship and responsibility.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Critical Generosity, Writing About Trauma

In December 1995, dance critic Arlene Croce published a piece in the *New Yorker* titled “Discussing the Undiscussable”, a review of Bill T. Jones’s dance piece *Still/Here*. The piece was controversial for a number of reasons the least of which was that Croce wrote the review even though she refused to see the piece. Croce’s article provoked a “near-cataclysmic response,” with hundreds of letters from lay readers to noted social critics and authors including Susan Sontag and Joyce Carol Oates (Berger 2, 3). In addition to the fact that she didn’t view the performance she wrote about, her article also provoked strong reactions because of her use of the term victim art and her assertion that Jones’s work fell into this category. The review therefore was not so much about Jones’s work but about such “victim art”, the state of criticism according to Croce, and the changes to art and criticism that she perceived as a result of the National Endowment for the Arts and the culture wars (19).

Like Adorno’s prescription that writing poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric, Croce’s comments are equally controversial and equally open for misinterpretation. While I ultimately disagree with Croce’s comments, my interpretation of Adorno can also prove useful in better understanding Croce’s predicament (and hence, my own in this dissertation, in which I negotiate the terrain between art and performance as a healing ritual of community and art/performances that exposes the logic that allowed trauma to happen in the first place). Part of Croce’s criticism of Jones’s work is what she believed to be its

blind appeal towards the audience's emotions. Though at first this could be interpreted as a lack of emotion and sympathy for people living with AIDS, I also can understand Croce's argument in the context of theorists, critics, and practitioners such as Adorno and Brecht who cautioned against the manipulation of emotion in performance (having seen from the ascendancy of the Nazi party what such manipulations could provoke). If Jones's goal was to make audience members think about the HIV/AIDS epidemic, then creating a performance which will foster an emotional catharsis in the audience (what Brecht tried to avoid with his alienation effect) would perhaps not be the most effective. Though I do not want to focus here on the dangers and benefits of emotion and sentiment in representations of trauma, it must be noted that Croce is not alone in her skepticism of performances which appeal to emotion.

What I find problematic in Croce's article are her many contradictions (not the least of which is her willingness to critique a performance she has not viewed). While Croce concedes that there is benefit to this type of performance, "That art heals those with AIDS is not in question, but no one 'outside' of that wants to see it" (15), I immediately become disturbed by her notion of "outside" and her assertion that anyone in that position would not want to see the performance. I wonder what Croce means by "outside." Is "outside" those people who don't have HIV? Or those who aren't gay? This is concerning because the very concept of there being an "inside" and "outside" the issue/experience of HIV is a large part of the problem that keeps HIV and AIDS spreading at such an alarming rate (people think that the disease cannot affect

them because of their social class, sexuality, etc.) and for similar reasons creates challenges for those seeking funding for research and the development of treatments.<sup>3</sup> Homi Bhabba's response to Croce's work addresses this issue. He writes,

Could it be that in identifying 'Still/Here' as a narcissistic art of victimage, Croce may be missing the show's spectacular performance of survival – the attempt, as in Plath's poem, to counter the privacy and primacy of the individual self with the collective historical memory? (48)

What Bhabba says is relevant to the larger argument of the dissertation – that national traumas destabilize notions of the individual self and replace it with the collective body – a body that Bhabba points out has its own "collective historical memory." HIV doesn't just impact the body of those who have the disease, but also and perhaps more importantly the national body – just as traumas such as Katrina and September 11<sup>th</sup> affect singular bodies and the collective national body.

Croce argues that she cannot be critical of someone that she feels "sorry for or hopeless about" (17). Again, though challenging, surely it cannot be impossible to write critically about a subject or artist that evokes emotions of pity, sympathy and compassion, a sentiment mirrored by Oates in her response to Croce: "By the end of her essay, Ms. Croce had lashed out indiscriminately at 'issue oriented art' [. . .] she acknowledged her resentment at being 'forced' to feel sorry for 'dissed blacks, abused women [and] disfranchised homosexuals" (32). Bhabba is similarly disturbed by Croce's reaction to victims on stage. He

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<sup>3</sup> This was still the case in the United States during the mid-1990's and is true in many countries throughout the world today.



writes, “And to go on to suggest that the inevitable effect of such ‘victim art’ is to solicit sympathy and collusion, rather than to invite a properly ‘disinterested’ critical reading, is fatally to confuse the dancer with the dance” (46). This quote brings up two points of note. The first is the idea that criticism must be “disinterested.” It seems clear that Croce’s idea of criticism operates through disinterest and disconnect. Oates echoes this saying, “What is particularly revealing in Ms. Croce’s position is a revulsion for art with ‘power over the human conscience.’ But what is wrong with having a conscience, even if one is a professional critic?” (34). In my experience, my professional criticism need not be separated from consciousness and furthermore, sympathy and compassion. I am very open with the fact that I have emotional as well as intellectual investment in the people and topics that I write about.

Secondly, Bhabba notes that one cannot conflate the product with the producer. In other words, the work of art can be judged on its own, separated from the personal life of the artist. This may be made more difficult when the artist is so closely linked with the subject (Jones was openly HIV-positive at the time of his performance) but it could also be argued that Croce actually re-victimizes Jones by asserting that he is “beyond” criticism because of his HIV-positive status. David Román in his book *Performance in America* addresses this, writing, “She presumed that since Jones was HIV-positive, any thoughts he might have on the time-honored theme of mortality must be narrowly understood as autobiographical, or, to use her deriding terms, ‘the cult of the Self’” (62). It may be useful here to think about the destabilization of the notion of individual in

conjunction with Román's quote. Accepting the argument that the individual does not in fact exist *a priori* to social constructions and performatives (Butler), then it becomes impossible to have a performance that is a "cult of the Self" because there is no Self to serve as a point of reference. Jones's performance therefore could never be about his experience of being HIV positive as an individual, but is about being part of a collective body. Jones's placement of the body on the stage accompanied by the bodies and voices of other HIV positive people make the performance as well as the experience a collective event.

Another one of Croce's concerns is that "Jones is undiscussable [. . .] because he has taken sanctuary among the unwell" (28). This refers to the fact that Jones included videotape of people with HIV/AIDS in the performance. Croce, as I interpret her words, is understandably asking how she can criticize something that includes representations of people who are suffering and dying. I can agree with Croce that this does make it more difficult to criticize the work but what I find most problematic is her not so thinly veiled implication that Jones deliberately surrounded himself by the dying *so that* his work could not be criticized – that it was a strategic move on his part to keep himself beyond criticism. This gives little credit to Jones who, as a professional dancer, would surely be accustomed to professional criticism.

I disagree with Croce's assessment of placing the dying on stage. Putting the dead or dying on the stage makes visible those who, for various reasons, have been rendered invisible. This makes a powerful statement about who and what can and should be seen on stage (both literal stages and social platforms) and how

the process of disappearing is a metaphorical and sometimes literal (the phrase disappeared is used to describe the victims of the Dirty Wars in Peru, Argentina and other countries) act of violence. This challenges and makes me rethink my work on Grupo Cultural Yuyachkani. Though Yuyachkani does not show video of the dead during their performances, the dead have a strong presence in their work. Some of their pieces including *Rosa Cuchillo* and *Antigona* were created based on interviews and workshops with victims of the Dirty War. Performance that represents the dead need not be beyond criticism. Croce insults the intelligence and strength of these artists by implying that they cannot handle or do not want to receive criticism about the form and the content of their work. This is where I find it helpful to turn to the idea of critical generosity, in which a partnership can exist between artist and critic.

### **Critical Generosity**

Román writes, “Criticism is inevitably about power. That seems inescapable. But it is how we use or abuse that power that structures our relationship with artists” (qtd. in Kuftinec 125). A number of scholars point to the power (perceived and real) of the scholar/academic/critic when they write about theater that attempts to make some sort of social intervention. Critical generosity does not have the same definition for each theorist. Dolan interprets critical generosity as the desire to write about plays that she genuinely likes, and that inspire her in some way in addition to embracing and openly discussing one’s relationship with the artists (*Utopia*), whereas others including Jan Cohen Cruz interpret it as criticism with the aims of the production in mind.

One of the challenges evident in the Croce controversy is how to assess the “value” or success of a play which depicts human suffering and/or which has a social purpose. The critic has to decide if the performance should be judged on its aesthetic value, its box-office success, reaction from audience members or their own personal reaction to the play. In the introduction to their book *Theatrical Performance During the Holocaust*, Rebecca Rovit writes,

We do not wish to champion or to judge morally the practice of artistic creation and theatrical performance by inmates during the Holocaust, nor do we feel we have the right to evaluate the artistic quality of productions by Jews in Nazi Germany or the creative impact of orchestral arrangements in ghettos or of cabarets spawned in the camps. (4)

There is no doubt that it is difficult to look at and evaluate in any sort of critical way art that has been created under such extreme circumstances, and so often by artists who often times have such noble intentions (intentions that include challenging regimes, creating awareness in audience members, promoting social change, etc.), but the work of critics who have faced similar challenges demonstrates that though difficult, it is possible.

I found myself in a similar dilemma when writing about the production of *The Breach*, which I will discuss in my chapter about Hurricane Katrina. I went to see *The Breach* multiple times and in multiple venues starting in New Orleans, where the production at Southern Repertory Theater had been met with critical acclaim and extended performance runs. Many audience members in the two evenings I saw the play were moved to tears, and audibly spoke out during the performance confirming that the play was a reflection of their own personal experience with the storm and its aftermath. Though the play was not necessarily

the most interesting I had seen from a dramaturgical perspective, it was certainly rich with material for my investigation into post-Katrina performance. When I went to see the play at Seattle Repertory Theater, a production that I was slated to review for *Theatre Journal*, I felt challenged to be transparent about the problems I had with the new production without diminishing the social themes and potential for creating awareness that the play induced. The play, under new direction, rewrites, and an increased budget that drastically altered the aesthetic of the show, was not, as I perceived it, as “good” as the performance I saw in New Orleans. The critics in Seattle agreed. However, many newspaper articles focused only on the play itself and did not examine the influence that Seattle’s director and production designers had on the play. Nor did they look at what I consider to be “the bigger picture” of what happened with the show. In addition to the performances themselves, Seattle Rep had arranged multiple pre and post-show talkbacks with the playwrights, director and actors. New Orleans author and journalist Chris Rose was also invited to Seattle to speak at Elliot Bay Bookstore, reading from his book *I Dead in Attic* and speaking about his experience during the storm. These conversations opened up an important critical dialogue with Seattle audience members, the majority of whom had only witnessed the events of Hurricane Katrina through the lens of the media. This critical dialogue is what I wanted to focus on within my review.

Román writes he is frustrated by academic training which teaches critics to only look at the negative or problematic elements of a performance. He writes, “I want to have a more generous relationship with the work, a more expansive

way of imagining how we might talk about it” (qtd. in Kuftinec 125). The critics in Seattle, perhaps under the particular pressures of critics working for newspapers, seemed only able to point out its problems. I, like Román, attempted to “imagine” alternative ways to talk about the production. I included in my review for *Theatre Journal* a description of the events taking place around the show:

Although I did find that some of the changes made to the show between Southern Rep’s production and Seattle Rep’s diminished what I found to be so powerful about the former, I believe that the opportunity for the play to provide alternative accounts of Hurricane Katrina to audience members outside of New Orleans should not be dismissed. Sometimes a production needs to be criticized for what it can do both onstage and off. (Nigh 473)

This was my attempt to acknowledge the problems in the production, but to also “generously” look at what the production was trying to do. I chose, like Sonja Kuftinec, to adopt Richard Schechner’s term ‘performance field’ examining in addition to what took place on the stage, “what it means to walk into the space of performance, to enter the space, and what people do afterward” (Kuftinec 127). Part of the “space” constructed around the performance of *The Breach* included the pre and post-performance activities that Seattle Rep had arranged, which I found important to discuss since the intention of the playwrights was to keep the spotlight on New Orleans and the Gulf Coast region.

When performances have socially-minded goals that the critic supports, there is an understandable desire to support the artists’ goals in their analysis of the artwork. But it does remain important to be able to question and admit both the possibilities and limits of theatre’s capability to make social interventions.

Taylor approaches this by asserting, “Theatre is politically too unstable to be an unequivocal, reliable ‘weapon’ in political struggle. Though it can alter the social order through the laborious process of consciousness raising, it is dangerously vulnerable to assimilation by any given social order” (*Crisis* 18). Amalia Gladhart writes, “Performance as practice is provisional, contingent, ‘acted out,’ but it is not intrinsically liberating or oppositional” (17). Harry Elam writing about Fugard’s *Slave Ship* writes, “. . . establishing a direct correlation between social action and the social protest performance is problematic” (13). Though these authors ultimately demonstrate the power of performance in their work, they are also able to openly discuss and admit to its limitations. Sonja Kuftinec, who has faced similar challenges, compounded by her close working relationship with the groups she writes about, has said, “In scholarship you’re pushed to be critical – to raise problems, raise questions – that’s the commodity that you are investigating and exchanging” (129). She asserts that being critical isn’t necessarily a bad thing, and borrowing Román’s definition of critical generosity, she claims one can mark the beauty and hope of a performance but at the same time challenge the feelings it evokes (126).

Just as it is important to admit the limits of theatre, it is important to be cautious about finding hope in the theatre (as Dolan does so explicitly in her book *Utopia in Performance*). In “Of Sugarcoating and Hope”, Laura Edmondson writes, “. . . when do invocations of hope turn into academic sugarcoating? When is the promise of transformation used as a theoretical salve for our unease about an unjust and genocidal planet where our economic privilege and material

comfort depend upon a harsh world order . . .?” (7). A critic’s desire to find hope in the theater potentially relates to a desire to remove themselves from responsibility in what is presented on stage. The representation of unrepresentable, unspeakable acts of violence on stage allow critics to contain, understand and then find some sort of moralistic hope by the end of the play, making the critic and their readers forget the social structures and continued violence from which that act emerged. Edmondson goes so far as to say that finding hope in the theater may be an act of violence itself (9).

Returning to Adorno, this desire to find hope in the theater can be understood as being similar to the desire to find meaning after a traumatic event. It is “violent” in the sense that it can re-victimize those who suffered from the trauma. She offers what I consider a challenge to my own work, “The extraordinary complexity of theatre and performance is strange stuff indeed, and perhaps in our rush to celebrate it, we are not being fully attentive to its ambiguities, dangers and gifts” (9). As I have pointed out there are many reasons to want to admire and celebrate theatre and performance which a) depicts horrors evoking nothing but sympathy and compassion and b) which has been created with a purpose of advocating social justice, educating audience members, raising money, etc.. However, it is important to be able to question the limits and failures of these performances as I try to do throughout the dissertation.

Another challenge for the critic of this type of performance is when the critic cares for the subject of the performance, but the play or production itself is not good (as was the case with the production of *The Breach* I saw in Seattle).



Here, I turn towards *Local Acts* written by Jan Cohen-Cruz. In the chapter “Criticism”, she explores how one can criticize community-based theater. She writes, “Expecting virtuosity, we miss the pleasures offered by commitment and risk. We are used to formal, distanced aesthetics and may under-appreciate art driven by a personal connection to the material and a need to communicate” (109). Furthermore she says, “[. . .]we have so internalized the value of ‘something wonderful right away’ that we may be less aware of a piece of art that works on us more slowly, even after the event is over” (109). As community-based theater often represents topics which are “difficult” and may sometimes represent traumatic events, it is useful to turn to theory on community-based theater to open up the discussion on how to approach theater which stages traumatic events. Though a performance may not “wow” the audience or critic right away, as Cohen-Cruz points out, it may be working on them in ways that cannot immediately be assessed.

When writing about the performances discussed in this dissertation, I have incorporated the philosophy of “critical generosity” into my work. Like Dolan, I choose to write about them because I find them to be powerful both as theatrical works and because of their social goals. If I found the work ineffective, I would not choose to write about them, or at least not to focus on them as much as I do. However, in an effort not to sugarcoat their work, my support and admiration of does not mean that I am not capable of problematizing these performances. Later in this dissertation, I will discuss the relationship between Grupo Cultural Yuyachkani and the Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission. I assess the

relationship between a state-sponsored Commission and a theatre group that claims to question the power of the state.

But, as critical generosity illuminates the relationship between artist and scholar that can in many cases be very close and within the realm of friendship, it also encourages critics to engage in dialogue with the artists that they write about. When I have encountered something that I find problematic in a performance, I make a point to ask them about it. For example, their play *Adios Ayacucho* is often referred to by scholars and by group members as being a one-man show even though Ana Correa opens up the show with musical accompaniment and sits on the stage the entire time of the show. For me, this character represents the thousands of women who mourned for the disappeared in Peru. Rather than writing about this issue without consulting the group, I spoke to Correa about it and she told me that she agreed that she is a second character in the show and that this had caused some conflict between her and some of the male members of the group. I now include her and my opinion about it when I write about this play. Perhaps more importantly the dialogue we had encouraged Correa to write about her experience playing this character and to voice her opinion to group members who had previously considered the play a solo performance. Members of Yuyachkani have told me that they value the relationship they have with me and other scholars who have interviewed them because, according to them, these discussions add to their own processing experience about their shows. I sometimes feel that I cannot possibly say anything about their work that they could not say much more eloquently, and that furthermore, because of the topic of

their work (the disappearance of nearly 70,000 of Peru's inhabitants during the Dirty War) I have little right as a U.S. American scholar to write about them. Like other topics, I made a point to talk to them about this but they feel that critical scholarship, particularly the vocabulary of performance studies, does offer a perspective of their work that is different than what they would say about it. Also, they point out that the distance critics have to their work, or to the topic of the Peruvian Dirty War may be helpful not detrimental in one's ability to analyze their performances.

Another challenge to scholars writing about theatre responding to a moment of social crisis such as the Dirty War in Argentina or the Holocaust is to avoid essentializing what that theatre is and looks like. When we anthologize and put into a book "Theatre of the Holocaust" or "Theatre during the Dirty War" we implicitly suggest that those plays, playwrights and theatre groups are the most significant and most defining of that time period. While it may be argued that in some cases those assertions are true, I also wonder what artists or works of art are excluded via that process. While the work of Yuyachkani (Peru), Griselda Gambaro (Argentina), Athol Fugard (South Africa) and others is undeniably significant, powerful, and well-known there are many other artists from those countries who do not get academic attention. Critics must be aware of and perhaps at least acknowledge the way in which they come to write about a particular performance and/or playwright. Many times scholars are drawn towards groups which have already been written about extensively. These groups, in part because of the attention they have received from scholars, are also

often the most produced and well-known internationally. Just as attention from scholars can have a positive material effect on a group, such as increased invitations to perform (particularly at academic venues) or increased funding opportunities (by demonstrating that the group has received scholarly attention) lack of attention from scholars can leave other groups without such opportunities.

### **What the Critic Offers**

In order to consider and defend the role of the scholar analyzing work that emerges from a major atrocity, we must consider what the critic offers, particularly during a time of crisis both in relationship to the art being critiqued and perhaps on a larger scale. Theatre scholars can offer a particular perspective to the traumas and atrocities addressed in the performances they study, which not only offer critical examination of the plays, but offer a new perspective on the atrocity itself.

The work of Diana Taylor, Jean Graham-Jones, David Román and others, points to the theatricality in the atrocities they discuss. Torture, for example, is explained by Graham-Jones and Taylor as something performed by the state with the physical component only being one part of what terrorizes both the body of the individual on whom the torture is inflicted and the larger body of the nation's population. Such a perspective does not trivialize the atrocities being discussed but rather offers a greater understanding of how those atrocities come to take place. The socio-political infrastructures of power, domination and ideology that determine the possibility of events such as the Dirty War in Peru, or the rise to power of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party in Europe, can be understood through

the performance studies lens. One need only look at the Nazi rallies in Germany to understand the role of performance in establishing and maintaining structures of power. Amalia Gladhart writes,

At stake in the linking of performance and coercion is the nature of social theatricality, the theatricality that takes place outside the neatly marked boundaries of the traditional – even the nontraditional-stage. The divide between stage and spectator is more membrane than wall, and as with osmosis, the *partial* permeability of that barrier is most important. (17)

This theatricality that takes place “outside the neatly marked boundaries” of sites of performance includes the theatricality of power, oppression and in some cases torture. Taylor similarly writes, “marginal groups fight for a theatre that addresses their concerns and interests. . .[T]his kind of oppositional theatre, as we shall see, often attacks or subverts the theatricality of social and political rites that legitimate exclusion and mythify oppression” (*Crucibles* 5). What makes the theatre Gladhart and Taylor describe powerful is precisely that the work is pointing to, critiquing and in some cases attacking the theatricality of the power structures they oppose.

As I discussed earlier, there is a potential trap of singularly defining “a” theatrical response to crisis, or foregrounding the works of some artists or works of art while simultaneously ignoring others. At the same time, as a researcher of performance responding to crisis, I have the ability to draw theoretical and critical attention to performances which might not otherwise receive attention.

Redefining what constitutes performance, shifting the focus to what the performance is trying to “do”, how it makes an intervention and/or de-prioritizing a performance’s aesthetic quality or box-office success, expands the field of what

performances critics can highlight for critical consideration. This is demonstrated in Diana Taylor's work, particularly about Argentina. In her books including *Crucibles of Crisis, Archive and the Repertoire* and *Disappearing Acts* Taylor addresses not only the more "traditional" performances created by artists including Griselda Gambaro, but also recognize the demonstrations of groups including the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo and H.I.J.O.S.

In this dissertation, I have also chosen to examine both "typical" productions such as *The Breach*, which has been produced by some major theatre companies and events that do not fit the "traditional" definition of performance but nonetheless can and should be read as performance. For example, I examine "performances" of those who adapted traditional Mardi Gras activities to express their anger, frustration, sadness, humor and general reactions to the events they survived. Returning to my assertion that responding to crisis with art is not frivolous but is in fact a powerful and necessary way to cope with trauma, we can see the efforts of both artists and "every-day people" responding to Katrina and other disasters as incredibly resilient, innovative, and in some cases daring. I also look at the public vigils that took place the night before the testimonies that were part of the Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission's work. These vigils involved many elements of performance by community members as well as more literal performances by members of Yuyachkani who accompanied the Commission during the testimonies.

Returning to Adorno, we can understand these performances as resisting forms of performance which may adhere to more typical constructions of

narrative. It is also an important resource for researchers of any kind to collect and analyze the thoughts, emotions and declarations of those who have undergone a traumatic event – emotions and thoughts which might not be documented in more “formal” sociological studies. For example, images of those who chose to wear costumes portraying Hurricane Katrina or F.E.M.A. at the Mardi Gras parades performs a clear message about the impact of Hurricane Katrina on their communities. Performance theorists can take this one step further to analyze the particular implications of these sentiments being performed and embodied as opposed to solely looking at other modes of expression.

It is easy to hypothesize that someone chooses to perform opposition because other forms of opposition or communication are not possible (forms which may be considered to be more powerful or effective). However, I suggest that we look at performance not as an *alternative* mode of expression during times of crisis, but in some cases the primary and most relevant forms of expression, particularly in communities or cultures such as New Orleans or the indigenous populations of Peru where performance is such an important mode of expression. For example, the work of El Teatro Campesino in the fields is often framed by the assumption that because the fieldworkers were illiterate, it was more effective to perform information on their rights to unionize. However, as Yolanda Broyles González points out in her book *El Teatro Campesino*, performance was well-known to those communities and was already used as a mode of education and expression.

### **Criticism Is Itself an Art**

How can critics take events that defy a sense of justice, which challenge the social structures upheld in language, and then use language (and a type of language that is often criticized for being “elitist” or “removed from reality” at that) to analyze those events and the work of art that responds to those events? In many ways we cannot. Writing about such events cannot and will not fully explain the how’s, why’s, where’s, and who’s of how such traumatic events occur. Nor can the writing of a theatre critic bring back the lives of the thousands, sometimes tens of thousands that were disappeared and tragically altered due to traumatic events. However, that does not mean that the work of the theorist is useless. The poet uses poetry to express the feelings they experience when they have witnessed or undergone moments of great pain or great joy, or when something major has taken place in their country, or in the world. I believe that for theorists like Diana Taylor, Sonja Kuftinec, Jean-Graham Jones, and many others including myself, theory and criticism is *our* poetry. We too are grappling with events which though “beyond words” are impossible to ignore.

Though it might be argued that addressing the immediate economic, health and safety needs of a community after a disaster, manmade or otherwise, is more of an emergency than thinking about the role of theatre in such a moment, theatre studies has a unique and important perspective to offer to fields including trauma studies. As I discovered at a multidisciplinary conference in New Orleans, entitled the Cultures of Rebuilding, there is no reason why theatre scholars, architects, sociologists, psychiatrists and journalists cannot come together to address the challenges of rebuilding communities in the Gulf Coast Area. At this



conference scholars of multiple disciplines and perspectives worked together to understand the interconnectedness of a society and a society's needs both before and after disaster. Just as art and architecture or music and the economy were not separate entities before Katrina, those areas of focus cannot be separated in critical discourse as the Gulf Coast is being rebuilt.

To return to the dilemma revealed in the Croce controversy with which I opened this session, Joyce Carol Oates wrote that "Criticism is itself an art form, and like all art forms it must evolve, or atrophy and die [ . . . ] Ms.Croce's *cri de couer* may be a landmark admission of the bankruptcy of the old critical vocabulary, confronted with ever-new and evolving forms of art" (40). Each individual time and circumstance must develop a new form of criticism. Though valuable to draw upon the writings of Adorno and Croce to challenge our thinking about art criticism, both Adorno and Croce are responding to a particular time, place and circumstance. As new traumas and new forms of art responding to those traumas emerge and evolve, so too must the criticism to that art evolve. Though there are ethical traps when writing about art which has responded to crisis, it is not an impossible task. The warnings and declarations of critics including Adorno, Croce, Edmondson, Román, Dolan and others can help us better understand the performances we watch and to criticize that art with a multitude of tools and lenses, creating what Adorno would emphasize, an appropriate *form* of criticism which responds to a particular type of performance – performance representing trauma.

In the following chapters I attempt to write about performances that address national traumas with both the spirit of critical generosity and without the urge to “sugarcoat” the possibilities of these performances. In some cases this has been a difficult balance since I have been inspired by these performances and have personal relationships with the artists that created them. However, I recognize that these performances emerge in a complex web of identity formation and meaning-making which renders each performance vulnerable to the very institutions which many of the performances seek to critique.

## CHAPTER TWO

### After September 11<sup>th</sup>: Ideal Citizenship, Protest and Performance

Immediately September 11<sup>th</sup>, public reactions were not yet affected by larger dominant narratives about the attacks and prescriptions of behavior from the media and the government. However, as time went on, one's reaction to September 11<sup>th</sup> was interpreted as a sign of one's allegiance to and relationship with the nation; a dominant narrative pervaded both media coverage of the event and the visual landscape in New York and throughout the United States. In her book *Iconic Events*, Patricia Leavy writes,

While 'chivalry' was the center of the Titanic hero narrative, 'patriotism' is the strongest current within the September 11<sup>th</sup> national mythology. The nation-state relied heavily upon this public sentiment which itself was systematically created by journalists and state officials. In particular the Bush Administration exploited this mass hysteria to garner support for pursuing entangled notions of heroism and visions of 'evil' and 'evil-doers,' within which there was nearly no room for dissent. (133)

Patriotism and victimization were at the center of the narrative (victimization in the sense that there was no major consideration of the role the US played in the events leading up to September 11<sup>th</sup>).

The definition of patriotism at this time was limited. To be patriotic, one *had* to support the President, *had* to support the call for war and *had* to support whatever decisions the government made in order to "protect" the nation from further terrorist attacks. A person could not simply declare that they were patriotic; they had to *perform* this identity. Depending on the time and place, their behavior, words, and even clothing (is the person wearing a pin of the

American flag or not?) were all perceived as indicators of their true level of patriotism. If these elements did not match the prescribed indicators of patriotism, the person was publicly understood as non-patriotic. To stand up against those things and particularly to advocate for peace after September 11<sup>th</sup> was tantamount to being anti-country, anti-government and unpatriotic.

The public responses to September 11<sup>th</sup> quickly constructed what I call an “ideal citizen.” In this case, some of the qualifications of an ideal citizen can be performed through displays of patriotism, support of the president, claiming victimization from September 11<sup>th</sup> and crying out for revenge. However, even those who participated in this performance were negated if their race, class and religion were not ideal. For example, Arabs and Arab-Americans were immediately Othered after September 11<sup>th</sup> and were not considered part of the collective group victimized by that day. Similar to the experience of Japanese-Americans after Pearl Harbor, whose motivation for living in the country and allegiance to the nation were questioned after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, though these Arabs were born or resided within the United States their status as Americans, as patriots, as citizens were heavily questioned after September 11<sup>th</sup>.

After September 11<sup>th</sup>, U.S. Americans were quickly encouraged to respond to the events in a very particular way, with instructions from public and political figures guiding us along the way:

It was gradually clear that national ideology was hard at work shaping how the traumatic event was to be perceived. . .The media aided the attempt to present a united American front. But this proved to be a fiction – a construction of a consensus in a Eurocentric and largely masculine form. . .While a ‘disciplining’ and homogenizing of United States

response was at work through the media, on the streets something fluid, personal, and varied was taking place. (Kaplan 13/14)

Kaplan points out the attempt to unify and control public responses to September 11<sup>th</sup>, the scripted performance that people were meant to conform to. But, as she notes, there were many who did not conform to this image.

It is what was taking place on the streets, what Kaplan describes as “fluid, personal, and varied” that interests me for the purpose of this dissertation.

Though widely circulated, images of a united, patriotic, Bush-supporting, pro-war public do not fully cover people’s responses after September 11<sup>th</sup>; though in many cases quickly silenced, “dissenting”<sup>4</sup> voices did rise up. In this chapter, I examine two performances/actions which engaged with, illustrated and challenged emerging narratives of how one should “appropriately” respond to September 11<sup>th</sup>. Performances which come from people who, for various reasons, are invoked into the September 11<sup>th</sup> narrative but do not accept the “roles” they have been assigned. The first is a public action created by members of September 11<sup>th</sup> Families for Peaceful Tomorrows. This group joined up with the Peace Abbey who had created Stonewalk previous to September 11<sup>th</sup>. Stonewalk is an action where people pull a one-ton stone, fashioned after a headstone commemorating all victims and casualties of war, from one city to another on a one ton caisson; members of September 11<sup>th</sup> Families for Peaceful Tomorrows had attended a retreat at the Peace Abbey and then approached the organization about pulling the

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<sup>4</sup> I put dissenting in quotation marks because I feel that the voices were only in dissent in the sense that they did not support the Bush Administration, but I want to avoid the negative connotation that dissent carries. These activists and performers were as much *pro* peace as they were *anti* Bush.

stone from Boston to New York City. They pulled the stone from Boston to New York in 2004 just before the Democratic and Republican National Conventions. I will examine how this group of people resisted dominant narratives about September 11<sup>th</sup> and in particular, resisted the narratives created about their supposed political positions as people who had lost someone on September 11<sup>th</sup>. I then look at Patriot Act, a play which confronted the new law by the same name and the law's conflation with September 11<sup>th</sup>. As New Yorkers, the creators of the piece stake a claim to the experience of September 11<sup>th</sup>, but like those who participated in Stonewalk, chose to openly and actively resist the national narrative about September 11<sup>th</sup> and its victims.

Both Stonewalk and Patriot Act are not directly about September 11<sup>th</sup>. They do not depict the events of that day, nor do they focus solely on the victims of the attacks (those who were killed that day). Both took place years after the event, once dominant discourse had taken hold of the rhetoric surrounding September 11<sup>th</sup>. However, Stonewalk as an action and Patriot Act engage with the long-term effects of September 11<sup>th</sup> and directly engage with the narratives that had conflated the attacks and those victims with patriotism and support of the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan. Both events took place during an election year when September 11<sup>th</sup> and the wars were primary and pivotal issues discussed by the candidates. Those involved with Stonewalk and Patriot Act had their own unique relationships to September 11<sup>th</sup> and in these performances they use their relational, emotional and physical proximity to the attacks in order to claim their stakes in the debate.

These performances and demonstrations are two examples of many that have taken place after September 11<sup>th</sup>. I have chosen them to illustrate the way in which the voices of those who were witness to and who lost loved ones that day were often silenced if they did not conform to dominant narratives about September 11<sup>th</sup>. The examination of these dominant narratives and counter-narratives demonstrate one of the factors of national trauma, their social construction. September 11<sup>th</sup> was intended to be an attack against the nation, but the full ramifications of that attack and the trauma against not only nearly 3,000 individuals but against the “body” of a nation was created by many powers-that-be within the United States including by the President, other officials of the government and by the media. September 11<sup>th</sup> was both intended to inflict a national trauma, and constructed to be a national trauma after the attacks took place, and in that construction inflicted further damage to non-ideal U.S. citizens. These performances highlight this phenomenon and counteract that process.

### **Stonewalk**

September 11<sup>th</sup> Families for Peaceful Tomorrows is an organization comprising friends and family members of the victims of September 11<sup>th</sup>, who have united to “turn [their] grief into action for peace” (Mission Statement Peaceful Tomorrows). The group was established almost immediately following September 11<sup>th</sup>, in recognition that family members of the victims of September 11<sup>th</sup> were in a unique position of experiencing both personal losses and sharing that loss with the entire nation.

Our losses were not simple murders, but international incidents, symbols, and public events. Billions of people experienced the exact moment of our loved ones' deaths. And whether we liked it or not, their deaths would become public property. They would be invoked on any number of occasions, for any number of purposes, by people we didn't know, and in many cases, didn't agree with or care for (Potorti 7).

Potorti, one of the founders of the group, points out the communal nature of the trauma that took place on September 11<sup>th</sup>. Describing their losses as “international incidents, symbols, and public events,” demonstrates how September 11<sup>th</sup> was so quickly understood to be a national trauma and a global event, even by those who experienced such intimate and personal consequences that day.

As it became clearer that the U.S. would invade Afghanistan and then Iraq in response to the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> the group was concerned that in the name of their family members, many more people would die. “They had seen, firsthand, innocent toddlers traumatized by the loss of a parent. . .to be touched so closely by violence and death was, for them, to demand an end to the possibility that others would suffer the same fate” (Potorti 21). Rather than demanding more death and revenge, their loss inspired a call for peace so that others would not have to experience the pain that they were now suffering and the grief that they were enduring. The use of their family members' names (sometimes generally referred to as the victims of September 11<sup>th</sup>, and sometimes the use of specific people's names) to justify war positioned them in a unique relationship to the war. “This war would be *their* war, fought in *their* names. This gave them the will to speak out. . .If September 11 united them in loss, it was the bombing of



Afghanistan that united them in their desire to attain justice without killing more innocent people” (Potorti 21).

Loretta Filipov, joined the group at the end of 2002. In an interview I conducted with Filipov she explains what it meant to her to find and join the group. “I was in awe of all these people like me who all lost someone, but our voices were all the same. It was heartening to hear people who thought the way I did and I didn’t have to explain myself. . .”. What she didn’t have to explain, among other things, was that even though she had lost her husband on September 11<sup>th</sup>, she did not believe that the U.S. should respond to the terrorist attacks with further violence. She says,

And I remember saying something like that everyone who did this is dead already or ‘we should go kill the terrorists who did this’ and I remember saying but they’re dead already. And people thought there was something wrong with me, I was in trauma, that I didn’t know. And I realized right away that if I made any statements other than catch phrases that were around the country, I was, it was unusual. (Filipov)

As a family member of a September 11<sup>th</sup> victim, Loretta was expected perhaps more than anyone to recite the script, the “catch phrases” that, as she points out, were taking place at a national level. The anticipated script for post-September 11<sup>th</sup> responses did not account for those like Loretta who were advocating peace, not revenge in the name of her loved one.

Though one might think that Loretta’s identity as having been so directly affected by September 11<sup>th</sup> would garner sympathy and support from people, for many it seemed her identity as an extended victim of the terrorist attacks was completely negated by her refusal to participate in the rhetoric of war and

revenge. This, as she points out, is true also for people's reactions to the group as a whole. "Very few people will say September 11<sup>th</sup> Families for Peaceful Tomorrows. *September 11<sup>th</sup> Families*, Oh my Dear, who did you lose? I mean conscious people will act on that. The rest say, oh yea, another peace organization" (Filipov). In terms of the national performance responding to September 11<sup>th</sup>, wherein it seemed that the whole nation was unified around this event and that the whole nation was sympathetic to and grieving for the victims of that day and their loved ones, in fact for many this sympathy extended only as far as to those who behaved/performed "appropriately." The dominant narrative about September 11<sup>th</sup> did not allow for people to see the members of Peaceful Tomorrows as a valid representation of victims of September 11<sup>th</sup>. Their platform for peace rendered them invisible on the national stage or, going further, labeled them as unpatriotic, and/or dissenters. While the victims of September 11<sup>th</sup> were becoming hyper visible in the growing narrative that would support the invasion of Iraq, the victims themselves and the loved ones of those victims who did not support this rhetoric made them invisible within this hyper visibility. Moments such as when President Bush addressing joint session of Congress on September 20<sup>th</sup>, 2001 said "You're either with us or you're with the terrorists" and when Hillary Clinton stated, "Every nation has to be either with us, or against us" created a clear division between those who supported and did not support the war.

Within the September 11<sup>th</sup> Families for Peaceful Tomorrows group, a smaller group of people joined an organization named Stonewalk. Stonewalk was created before the attacks on September 11<sup>th</sup>, in 1999 "as a way of honoring

ordinary people in all parts of the world who are killed as a result of war” (Abbey). Stonewalk is a public action where a one ton stone honoring all “Unknown Civilians Killed in War” is pulled for long distances (Abbey). There are different groups within the larger group of Stonewalk who have pulled the stone in locations including the United States, Great Britain, Ireland and Japan. The Stonewalk that Peaceful Tomorrows participated in began on August 4, 2004 in Boston, Massachusetts during the Democratic National Convention and arrived in New York City in time for the Republican National Convention that same month. The officially declared intention of the performance was not to be political, but to provide an opportunity for members of Peaceful Tomorrows to honor those whom they lost and those that would be lost in Afghanistan and Iraq (Abbey). By remembering and honoring these “unknown civilians” they hoped to promote peace and not violence. “Through this walk, and through speaking events in thirty-three communities along the way, they will bear witness to the tragic reality that civilian casualties constituted about 80% of the deaths in war in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and ask that this human toll be a prime consideration in future policymaking decisions” (Potorti 2).

The group considers what they do to be a combination of “protest, group therapy, and extreme sports rolled into one” (Levenson). There were many performative and ritualistic elements of the march. Every day before the group started to pull the stone, they would pray and call out the names of those who they had lost. They then began the task of carrying the stone along their designated path:

It [the stone] is carried by human power alone on a specially designed caisson weighing one ton and equipped with a hydraulic brake for moving downhill. Needless to say this is very difficult and exhausting for anyone involved in moving the stone. However it is nothing compared to the suffering endured by those who suffer in the midst of war. (Abbey)

Carrying the stone was a “grueling task” (Filipov) that would test the endurance of many. Including the device that the group pulled the stone on, in all, the weight surpassed two tons. In order to better understand the significance of these participants carrying the stone it might be useful to think of performance artists such as Marina Abramovic, Rob Atthey, Bob Flanagan and Carolee Schneeman, among others, who endure pain and suffering in their performances, making their bodies the primary site of their performance. One participant in Stonewalk who had lost his son on September 11<sup>th</sup>, and according to Dot Walsh was still “very, very angry” about his son’s death told her that “the sweating and the hardship of the journey helped him work through some of his anger” (Walsh). Walsh goes on to say, “And you had time to think when you’re pulling, you had time to be silent and just be with yourself also. And its an incredible journey, you’re along the road you know beside trucks, cars and everything else. . .”.

As I will describe in more detail in my chapter on performance and the Peruvian Dirty War, trauma is an embodied experience. The power of movement and utilizing the body to testify to one’s trauma is underappreciated in western psychology, which valorizes verbal testimony as the privileged coping and healing mechanism. The physical experience of pulling the stone offered an opportunity to embody the experience of having lost a loved one in the terrorist attacks. For Filipov, who mentioned that people kept telling her she needed to

“do something,” the march did make her feel like she had been proactive. “At the end of the day you felt you did something. You did something. You didn’t have a new invention, you just did a lot of work. . .” (Filipov). For the audience this action externalized the internal pain that the participants endured because of their loss and their frustrations at the use of their loved ones’ memories to advocate war. Like performance artists who inflict pain on themselves by cutting themselves, hitting themselves, etc., participants in Stonewalk put a particular emphasis on the body. Furthermore, the emphasis on the body during their journey rubs up against the absence of the bodies of those in the World Trade Center that day. Since very few bodies were recovered from the site intact, the victims of September 11<sup>th</sup> were, like victims of the Dirty Wars in South America, disappeared. Like those in South America who had to proceed with funerals and mourning rituals without a body, so too did many whose family members were killed on September 11<sup>th</sup>. The absence of bodies perhaps contributed to the ability of the Bush Administration to utilize the names and memories of these people for their pro-war agenda. The absence of both the bodies and the towers themselves gave the space for something to be put into that empty space. What was put into that space was a pro-war rhetoric. However, the action of Stonewalk put bodies into place: bodies that were directly tied to the victims of September 11<sup>th</sup> and bodies that were standing up for and standing in for peace.

The “audience” of Stonewalk consisted both of those who were aware of the demonstration (there was publicity about Stonewalk and some people intentionally came out to view them) and those who, in the routine of their regular

days (driving to work, running errands, etc.), were unexpectedly confronted with the demonstration. I am interested in those who were not expecting to see Stonewalk. Three years after September 11<sup>th</sup>, moving towards an election, rhetoric regarding September 11<sup>th</sup> at a national level had become relatively solidified in a pro-war, pro-Bush stance. Those who saw Stonewalk were confronted with an image of September 11<sup>th</sup> victims' families that did not conform to the pervasive, widely circulated image of these victims. The Stonewalk action intercepted the controlled image of September 11<sup>th</sup> victims and family members of victims that were playing a very particular "role" in the dramas of the Republican and Democratic National Conventions. When I asked Filipov if anyone confronted the group, she said,

When we had events it was always positive as I recall. . .we'd pack the halls of wherever we were and the events we held were always positive. But along the route from time to time there'd be, you know, when the policemen's calling out, [ . . . ], not nice things – that isn't nice. I can't remember where that was, somewhere in Connecticut. (Filipov)

Without interviewing them, it is difficult to say for sure what caused the police officers in Connecticut to react in such a way. One can imagine though since demonstrations for peace were often considered disrespectful to those who had died on September 11<sup>th</sup>, that the police officers felt that the actions of Stonewalk disrespected their fellow "fallen" police officers. In some ways these officers might have felt more entitled to claiming sympathy towards the victims, even though they were confronted with people intimately connected to the victims of that day. Because they were not supportive of a pro-peace stance, they felt more entitled to a connection to the victims of September 11<sup>th</sup>. Again, the political

stance of the group superseded and negated their immediate relationships to those who died that day.

For others, Stonewalk presented an opportunity to the audience to participate and express their own grief. Walsh describes her experience:

The closer we got to New York City, the more people would come out and they would put their hands on the stone. . .and they would tell their story. And the stories were so incredible. And you know we carried the book, the *New York Times* has a book with not all of the people who were killed on that day but a huge volume of people and little vignettes that were written by family members of friends and so people would highlight the name of the person they were remembering and they would talk about their relationship to that person. And it was very emotional.

These responses to Stonewalk are reminiscent of actions that took place during the public testimonies that were part of the Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission's work, which I discuss later in the dissertation. While the U.S. Government did form a 9/11 Commission, this commission was very different from Truth and Reconciliation Commissions that have taken place in countries including South Africa and Peru. The 9/11 Commission's primary focus included reporting on the "facts and causes relating to the terrorist attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001" (Government info) and to "make a full and complete accounting of the circumstances surrounding the attacks, and the extent of the United States' preparedness for, and immediate response to, the attacks" (Government info). While I won't go into a full comparison between commissions (a comparison I do believe is worth making) it is interesting to note that the 9/11 Commission did not provide the forum for public testimonies and spaces for grieving, like those that have taken place during TRCs.

People had to and did find alternate modes of having those experiences, including during the march of Stonewalk. Public performances and rituals such as Stonewalk provided a much needed space for people to come together and mourn and to come together in the hopes that September 11<sup>th</sup> might be used towards advocating world peace, not war. Such dialogue and conversations were not taking place at a larger public level or in the media since at the time dominant discourse was still pro-war. However, it is important to note that there is a substantial difference between allowing those testimonies to take place at a nationally public level and in front of public officials (as was the case with the Peruvian TRC) and these testimonies taking place on a much smaller and more intimate level. There was no grand-scale national and public performance of healing nor was there an opportunity for family members of victims or survivors of September 11<sup>th</sup> to give their testimony – there was only space for official investigations of what took place that day, which were then used to create policy and to justify the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq.

Since so much of the response to September 11<sup>th</sup> involved public demonstrations of grief, it is important to understand how grief functions at a public and social level. Just as national traumas are socially constructed grief, being a part of the social response to these traumas, is also culturally constructed and controlled. Freud's analysis of grief is the foundation upon which most psychological discussion about mourning is built. It is important to note, therefore, that his interpretation of grief established a sense that the bereaved is "removed from society" by their mourning, and that their goal is to process their



loss – eventually replace that loss - and rejoin society. Freud often coupled his discussion of mourning with the state of melancholia, most famously in his essay “Mourning and Melancholia.” In “Mourning and Melancholia” he describes this replacement of the lost object for another as the “goal” of mourning and the inability to do this as the state of melancholia (Gay 586). Freud’s interpretation of grief posited it as an illness from which one is expected to recover: “Out of this work has evolved a series of ‘tasks’ associated with each of the dimensions of grief. . . ‘Recovery’ usually implies a return to a former state and is most often used to describe a return to health after an illness” (Schacter 298). When Freud depicts the bereaved as existing outside of their society and community, he neglects to recognize how they are influenced by that society, and how they can in turn influence their society. As more recent research on grief by scholars including Judith Butler and Ann Cvetkovich have observed, grief is not private, but always, whether demonstrated publicly or not, constructed within the public sphere.

Freud also neglects a situation, such as national traumas, in which the entire society has experienced a loss and the victim exists within a grieving community, as was the case after September 11<sup>th</sup>. When a death occurs which is, according to psychological analysis, considered unusual (such as the attacks on the World Trade Center) the mourning rituals are complicated because there may not be an existing protocol for this process. The grieving person who does not have a protocol to turn to is considered politically dangerous, and must be controlled; “If care is not taken, if grief is artificially inflamed or prolonged, or if

the expected conclusion is never satisfactorily achieved, the temporary chaos of death and mourning can spill over into the society at large and threaten its stability” (Holst-Warhaft 6). This chaos must be harnessed by a social protocol, and when there is no pre-established protocol a vacuum exists which can then more easily be controlled by the state. The state can manipulate this grief to further its own political agenda. “Prescribing and controlling grief through consolatory rhetoric that emphasizes the meaning of the death in the service of the state thus becomes an essential element in the overall ‘manufacture of consent’ through which the state persuades its citizens to participate in war” (Acton 3).

In the introduction to her book *Precarious Life*, Judith Butler examines the phenomenon of culturally “acceptable” vs. “unacceptable grief.” Here she writes there is certain grief that is

[. . .]nationally recognized and amplified . . . Some lives are grievable, and others are not; the differential allocation of grievability that decides what kind of subject is and must be grieved, and which kind of subject must not, operates to produce and maintain certain exclusionary conceptions of who is normatively human: what counts as a livable life and a grievable death. (XV)

The social control and influence over grief and mourning can in fact determine *who* is considered worthy of grief, and who is not and thereby who is culturally considered to be human.

Further, as Butler points out, the loss of some lives can be inflated while others are diminished (xv). The inflation of these lost lives removes them from their original and individual identity and places them onto the national public stage in the role of a political or social agenda and cause, while the denial of the

loss of those who are socially othered also contributes to this cause. Here we begin to see how political agendas can be advanced through the manipulation of public grief. In the United States the 3,000 lives lost on September 11<sup>th</sup> were “nationally recognized and amplified” and eventually amplified into an overwhelming cause and determination towards war. Their lives no longer belonged to their loved ones, but instead belonged to the entire nation, to be used as justification for war. At the same time, the Afghani and Iraqi lives of civilians who would be killed as a result of this warfare were socially diminished and denied.

Butler believes that the appropriate course of grieving does not involve the eventual replacement of the object we have lost, as Freud suggested, but rather that “one mourns when one accepts that by the loss one undergoes one will be changed, possibly forever” (21). Perhaps mourning has to do with agreeing to undergo a transformation, the full result of which one cannot know in advance. Mourning the loss of our attachment to an object, person or ideology exposes us to our vulnerabilities in this world. We are vulnerable through our connections to each other, and vulnerable to the actions of others and/or events which lie beyond our control. When we become aware of this, one might be inclined to withdraw, or to act out in anger, rage and fear as partly evidenced by the overwhelming call to arms that took place after September 11<sup>th</sup>. In order to mask the vulnerability exposed on September 11<sup>th</sup>, and in attempt to move the image of the country back towards an “impermeable” nation, the United States has replaced its grief with the performance of power and strength.

However, there is the potential to unite in this, if we can acknowledge the fact that we all experience vulnerability to each other. Awareness of this may lead us towards actions of peace, “just as denial of this vulnerability through a fantasy of mastery (an institutionalized fantasy of mastery) can fuel the instruments of war” (Butler 29). In other words, it is not in fact the awareness of our vulnerability that drives us to violence, but rather the fear and denial of it.

Gail Holst-Warhaft shares a similar opinion to Butler:

Most of us do not seek to prolong grief; it unhinges us, makes us behave in abnormal ways, divides us from the rest of society. We have not been taught to value this unhinging. Grief makes us vulnerable, but it may also empower. It tears us apart, but it may reassemble us in ways that astonish. (19)

There is in fact a value in this unhinging, if we allow ourselves to fully feel and recognize our grief, then we will be able to recognize and feel sympathy towards those who suffer in other parts of the world, and within our own national borders.

Holst-Warhaft goes on to assert that grief can in fact be mobilized on behalf of those who have been socially victimized;

But however much it is controlled, there is always an element of the unexpected about grief. Its emotional potential is inexhaustible. For the angry, the ambitious, the deranged, the persecuted, and the marginalized, the energy of extreme grief may offer a unique opportunity for social mobilization and political action. (9)

Despite efforts to control a person’s grief, its capabilities as a performatic emotion reach beyond the control of the state, in particular for those who have been culturally Othered.

The funeral-like procession of Stonewalk and the stone itself (reminiscent of the headstones in Arlington National Cemetery) implements the performance-

aesthetics of public mourning. The cemetery is designated as a publicly sanctioned place to express grief; the group is moving this designated performance-space from the cemetery itself into the streets where grief is not normally expressed. Many of the witnesses, or audience members, of their action, those who are driving to work, getting the mail from their post-boxes, etc., did not necessarily choose to see their performance of grief. This is significant because it means many of those who witnessed this action were confronted with images of grief when they are not expecting it. This fortifies the group's mission to recognize grief not as an individual experience, taken outside of the every-day "environment", but rather a communal emotion that permeates all aspects of life. This action also contradicts Bush's declaration, only two weeks after September 11<sup>th</sup>, that the time for mourning was over. At a time when grief and mourning had been either put to the side or utilized for a pro-war position, the Stonewalk action put grief and mourning in front of people who may have "moved on" from this emotion. This action not only foregrounded the emotion of grief, it directly tied it to a pro-peace position.

For these participants mourning and remembering those lost is an important form of protest. Not only has this group made an effort to remember their own loved ones that died on September 11<sup>th</sup>, but they also attempt to draw a connection between the suffering and grief that they have experienced, and the suffering and grief of all those around the world who have experienced the loss of a loved one due to violence. The members of Stonewalk recognize the suffering of others around the world, believing that this recognition of others' grief is a

necessary step in the peace movement. With that sentiment in mind, during the week of the RNC, the names of those killed in Iraq since the beginning of the U.S. invasion were read aloud at the St. Mark's Church every night.

Members of September 11<sup>th</sup> Families for Peaceful Tomorrows understood very well the devastation of the terrorist attacks of that day. These people not only experienced the trauma of something like that happening in their country, the national trauma they experienced with many others, but they also experienced the trauma of losing someone very close to them. And yet, their choice to take their personal loss and advocate on the national "stage" for peace and justice, their declarations against the invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan and their insistence that they did not want the memories of their loved ones to be used for political purposes removed them from the "right" to participate in the dialogue about the national component of the trauma. While the memory of their loved ones could be used at a national level, their voices could not. Their involvement in Stonewalk, a march that went out in the public for people to see who did and did not expect to see them there gave a stage for their voice.

### ***The Patriot Act***

*Patriot Act* is a play written by Saint Joe Shahadi and The Lovely and Talented Toni Silver<sup>5</sup> examining the content and impact of the US Patriot Act. The play utilizes vaudeville performance aesthetics using song, dance and humor to lighten the mood of the serious implications of the Patriot Act as a law.<sup>6</sup> The

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<sup>5</sup> These are the pair's stage names.

<sup>6</sup> Description of Patriot Act based on performance August, 20<sup>th</sup> 2004 at Washington Square Church.

play premiered in Brooklyn in 2004 the same year that the Republican National Convention took place in New York, three years after September 11<sup>th</sup> and approximately one year before many of the provisions of the Patriot Act were set to sunset.<sup>7</sup> This play addresses the relationship between September 11<sup>th</sup> and its aftermath including legislation such as the Patriot Act. The identity of the performers as New Yorkers and the particular implications of Joe's identity as an Arab-American places them in direct contrast with the rhetoric surrounding September 11<sup>th</sup>, rhetoric that created a narrow definition of who could be considered victims of September 11<sup>th</sup> and who was considered an "ideal citizen" after September 11th.

Silver is a performance artist based in New York City and Vienna who has been performing since 1998 (Toni Silver Website). Silver's performances are autobiographical and explore themes of politics and queer identity using humor, dance and song. Some of her other performances include, *A Cab is Cheaper Than a Funeral*, *Leave Her to Beaver* and *I Am No Young Lady*. Silver premiered a performance *Booby Traps Everywhere: Ground Zero before and after*. . . This performance is considered to be the first performance about September 11<sup>th</sup> to be done in New York City after the terrorist attacks (Toni Silver Website) and was directed by Shahadi. Shahadi is also a performance artist who does both collaborations and solo work. His works are also autobiographical and explore American iconography. As Shahadi describes,

I have always been fascinated with in-between states. I think that is partly my personality and partly because I'm Arab American: in the culture but

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<sup>7</sup> The term sunset refers to when provisions in a law will no longer exist.

not of it... The tension between austere formality and the vulgar energy of American pop idioms characterizes the work I make in different media. Whether that is a result of the hybrid element of my identity I could not say, which I suppose is the unique condition of second generation Americans. But in my work I tend to explore related themes of particular significance to Arabs in post 9/11 America: shame and exposure, surveillance, authority, and voyeurism. (thisisworldtown.com)

Shahadi had been interested for some time in doing what he called, “performing public documents” (Shahadi) and discussed it with Silver who was interested in participating. The two of them started to work on the piece by trying to read the bill, which according to Shahadi was “almost impossible.” Shahadi described to me in an interview, “That was kind of the real beginning: us realizing that this document was public in the sense that you could read it online if you wanted. . . except that you couldn’t because the legal jargon was so impossible to decipher.”

Joe and Toni humorously demonstrate the way in which the loss of personal rights that occur as a result of the Patriot Act may play itself out (one gleefully knocks on the door representing an FBI agent while the other makes a weak attempt to protest the searching of his/her “private” property); their use of humor offsets the clear assertion the performance makes that privacy and the rights of U.S. Citizens are greatly compromised by the Patriot Act. Though humorous, there is an underlying current of sadness throughout the performance. When I asked Joe about this he said, “We talked frankly about wanting to feel safe again (post 9/11) and perhaps some of the grief you read in this work is our realization as we studied it that the USA Patriot Act doesn’t really protect us from anything (but rather makes us vulnerable to our own government).” Though not a result of the loss of an object or person, what these two mourn is the idea of safety



and belonging that they experienced before September 11<sup>th</sup>. What was worse was it wasn't only the terrorist attacks that destabilized this notion of security but also the reactions of the U.S. government to the attacks.

During the play, Joe, representing his present self, speaks to the self he was before September 11<sup>th</sup> – like many in the nation, and the narrative of the nation itself, there was a clear divide between the before and the after September 11<sup>th</sup> self. In this monologue he addresses the conflict he will have over his last-name and consequently his self-identity. His last name, Shahadi, which means patriot and martyr in Arabic, became a source of shame and fear for him during the Gulf War and now again in a post September 11<sup>th</sup> America. He tells his past self that there will come a time when he asks his father to take their last name off of the front door, and that he eventually will shave his beard. It is clear that Joe is grieving for his identity as an Arab-American, which he feels he has to apologize for or cover up because of a renewed and reinvigorated fear of Arabs after September 11<sup>th</sup>. Although his experiences with the trauma of September 11<sup>th</sup> - the anger, fear, grief, sadness, exhaustion - are just as valid as anyone else who experienced the devastation of that day, he is not necessarily recognized as an “acceptable” victim within the constructed post-September 11<sup>th</sup> culture. Joe's experiences after September 11<sup>th</sup> not only were racist and prejudicial but also failed to acknowledge that this group of people had *also* been traumatized on that day just as much as anyone else had. In this monologue he not only demonstrates that he mourns for the direct victims of September 11<sup>th</sup>, but also that he mourns his own loss as a result of that day, the loss of his proud identity as an Arab-

American. This monologue reflects what Joe refers to as his double-identity. Furthermore, people such as Joe could be said to have gone through a double-trauma, the trauma of the terrorist attacks and the trauma of realizing that their identity would become a source of conflict and in Joe's case shame in their lives.

This aspect of the performance has become no less relevant ten years after the attacks and six years after the play premiered when this othering process can still be seen. During the fall of 2010 there was a large debate about whether a Muslim community center and mosque should be established two blocks from Ground Zero. The rhetoric surrounding the debate illustrates the way in which Muslims were perceived after September 11<sup>th</sup> (the perception, of course, existed before then as well). A CNN nationwide poll showed that 68% of respondents felt that the mosque should not be built so close to Ground Zero. Many have voiced that they feel the mosque would be disrespectful to the victims of September 11<sup>th</sup>. This very notion negates the fact that Muslims were also victims of that day. At a rally in support of the mosque Ali Akram notes, "There are many Muslims who lost Muslim family members at ground zero, so when they come to visit ground zero as a memorial, they should be able to walk two blocks down and pray for their loved ones" (Mosque protests).<sup>8</sup> Not only did Muslims lose family members that day, but Muslims just as non-Muslims who did not experience a loss that day were equally traumatized by the attack against the nation. Some Muslims might have experienced what I call a double-trauma, knowing that the attacks were committed in the name of Islam and that because of

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<sup>8</sup> September 11<sup>th</sup> Families for Peaceful Tomorrows officially supports the building of the mosque.

this they now might themselves become victims of hate crimes, lose friends, feel responsible for explaining or apologizing for their religion, etc.. Part of constructing a national trauma is finding someone to blame. In this case blame extended beyond the terrorists who committed the crime and extended towards the larger Muslim community. This perception of Muslims as “perpetrators” did not allow them to step outside of that role and also be seen as victim. Joe’s dilemma in the play resonates with the experience of many Muslims today who find themselves having to defend both their religion *and* their allegiance to the nation, since those now more than ever are seen as conflicting identities.

One of the most personal and poignant moments in the piece takes place when Toni discusses her experiences with September 11<sup>th</sup>, the only reference the play overtly makes to that day. This monologue was originally part of *Booby Traps Everywhere*, the play she had written after September 11<sup>th</sup>. In the excerpt she includes in *Patriot Act*, Toni describes her whereabouts that morning, at her girlfriend’s apartment located at a very close proximity to the World Trade Center. When performing this monologue on August 20<sup>th</sup>, 2004, Toni began to cry. As an audience member, I felt a great sense of sadness and traumatized stress emanating from her. During her monologue she simultaneously addresses Joe who played John Ashcroft (who was the attorney general at the time). Her experience with September 11<sup>th</sup> was not expressed passively; rather she actively attacked Ashcroft and his words that supported the Patriot Act. Theatrically, the play represents what did not often happen in public debate, a direct confrontation between Ashcroft and those who had been impacted by the terrorist attacks but

did not support the Patriot Act. Her trauma is not debilitating for her, but rather provides the strength with which she confronts Ashcroft. This is key in terms of thinking about how trauma is often treated as a disease or a weakness that must be cured, when in fact it can also be a form of empowerment.

The fact that this monologue comes from *Booby Traps*, makes a direct connection between what was taking place with the Patriot Act and September 11<sup>th</sup>. While the Bush Administration invoked September 11<sup>th</sup> to defend legislation such as the Patriot Act, Toni also invoked September 11<sup>th</sup> but in this case to challenge and confront the new law. When I asked Joe about this particular section of the play he said that they knew that they “needed to talk about 9.11 because that had been the justification for the Patriot Act.” He goes on to say, “And as New Yorkers, we felt very strongly that the Republicans had co-opted 9.11 and made it a political symbol, at the expense of an understanding of it as a human event.” It was clear that Toni’s experience and residual trauma from that day did not belong to any political party. As a form of protest against the Patriot Act, and other political uses of September 11<sup>th</sup>, she reclaimed her experiences as a New Yorker on and since that day.

For me as an audience member, these two moments in the play were some of the most powerful. It took the overwhelming nature of the law and showed its very immediate ramifications on people’s lives. It also made the connection clear between the Patriot Act and the national climate of fear, patriotism and unquestioning support of the Bush Administration that existed after September 11th. Shahadi notes, “People reacted most strongly to the personal narratives.

Toni's 9/11 monologue and my monologue where I talk with my past self. . . I think the political information took longer to sink in." This performance is an excellent example of the notion that the personal is political. By interacting with the law and the politics surrounding it as well as with its very intimate, personal implications in people's lives, Shahadi and Silver brought urgency to the performance which was perhaps lacking in the larger discourse taking place about the Patriot Act, via the media and political debates. Though Shahadi prefers to create performances that do not hammer in a political message, remaining more ambiguous and open, in this case they "wanted people to leave the show informed and moved to act against the Bush Administration by voting against them" (Shahadi). The goal was clear, convince the audience that the Patriot Act was a violation of people's civil rights and privacy, and convince the audience that they should not re-elect George W. Bush.

In the closing moments of the play, images of soldiers in the war in Iraq were interspersed with pictures of Iraqi civilians injured in the war and pictures of George Bush in various military outfits. While these pictures were showing, Joe lip-synched a version of Danny Boy, a song that is often connected to funerals and mourning. The pictures of the fallen soldiers and Iraqi civilians offered an opportunity to publicly recognize not only those soldiers whose lives are paying for our perceived freedom from terrorism, but also for those innocent civilians in Iraq who have died as a result of this war. The entire performance can be viewed as an educational piece, disseminating information to audiences about the Patriot Act that seems to encourage activism against the Bush administration and its

policies surrounding September 11th. The fact that they use pictures of both American and Iraqi victims of the war shows that commonality of grief can be used as an inspiration to activate peace instead of more violence which will only lead to more death and more grief, much like the actions of Stonewalk demonstrated.

The play was performed in a wide variety of venues including New York University, Judson Church (New York City), Mercy College (Dobbs Ferry), Nexus Gallery (Philadelphia) and then found an international audience in Vienna. Eventually unsolicited organizations invited them to do performances of the show. Since the play had such a strong political objective, to get people to not re-elect Bush, I asked Shahadi if they specifically sought pro-Bush audiences. He responded, “I don’t know if we were searching for pro-Bush audiences, but we definitely played to a few. At Dobbs Ferry for example and there were a few ex-soldiers from the Iraq War who spoke up at One Arm Red [where the play premiered]. No one was overtly hostile though.” At a talkback I attended at Judson Church, people confronted Shahadi and Silver about the piece, asking if the legislation wasn’t necessary in order to prevent further terrorist attacks. Shahadi and Silver were clearly well-versed in the details of the law and were able to make a well-informed and surprisingly non-emotional response, asserting that the law did not make the U.S. safe. While I might not have agreed with all that was being said by my fellow audience-members, there was a certain level of accountability in having to sit in a space with other people and look people in the eyes as one expressed their views on the topic. Just as traumas are experienced

collectively, the communal experience of watching performances creates communities not unlike those that spontaneously emerged in sites such as Union Square immediately following the attacks.

*Patriot Act* is not directly about September 11<sup>th</sup>, but it speaks to the nature of a national trauma. The trauma of September 11<sup>th</sup> extended beyond that day and had many ramifications including changes to law and policy, creating new traumas including racism and fear-mongering. Invoking the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, politicians including those in the Bush Administration attempted to use the culture of fear pervading the United States in order to support their decisions to invade Afghanistan and Iraq and to create the US Patriot Act. This reflects what Maurice Stevens spoke about in his keynote at the New Approaches to Trauma conference at Arizona State University West: that traumas serve as an instrument of the state, promoting state-sanctioned actions such as enlistment into armies, a culture of fear, prescriptions to medications, etc. *Patriot Act* illuminates this aspect of trauma and asserts that one could be affected and traumatized by September 11<sup>th</sup> and yet not conform to state-sanctioned responses to the attacks. It is clear that Silver and Shahadi want to feel safe and protect themselves, having been traumatized and frightened by what they witnessed on September 11<sup>th</sup>; however, they can admit their own trauma and fear while simultaneously resisting legislation that was sold to the American public as a way of protecting its citizens.

The very name of the play, *Patriot Act* references not only the piece of legislation that the performance addresses, but also the notion that patriotism can

be seen as an act, a performance. After September 11<sup>th</sup> who and how that identity was performed excluded those who did not conform to the definition of an ideal citizen as defined by the government. Shahadi and Silver claim a place in this national performance of citizenship and as victims of September 11<sup>th</sup>, while at the same time remaining distanced from a complete ability to step into that role – what Shahadi calls in the culture but not of it. After all, as a gay woman and Arab-American male it is difficult and sometimes problematic to seek complete assimilation into a culture that perpetually frames you as Other. As Dr. Stevens noted in his keynote the idea that we are all the same until a traumatic event occurs needs to be problematized; while traumatic events even further limit the definition of “ideal” citizen, these limitations existed well before the event occurred.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have been interested less in the ways that performance can be used to understand the spectacular nature of the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> and more in the larger performance of patriotism and citizenship that followed that day. There were a wide variety of responses to September 11<sup>th</sup> ranging from cries for revenge to wishes for peace. However, a common element of national traumas is that they are quickly constructed through agents of the nation-state including the media and the government. These agencies quickly create dominant narratives about the event, silencing narratives which do not conform to these. Not long after September 11<sup>th</sup>, what people said about the event, how they presented their identities or opinions in relationship to the nation, how they



displayed their patriotism (or their lack of display), what they did with their grief and how they responded to the Bush Administration either conformed to this prescribed performance, or was viewed as subversive. New Yorkers and family members or loved ones of September 11<sup>th</sup> victims were particularly under the “spotlight” in terms of their behavior, what I refer to as their performance, in the months and years after September 11<sup>th</sup>. Their identities and the identities of those who died that day were used as part of a national performance of politics and rhetoric whether they wanted to participate in that rhetoric or not. These particular members of the nation-state were prescribed certain roles in the national drama taking place, given a script of sorts of catch phrases and platforms they were meant to support. However, many New Yorkers and many of those connected to September 11<sup>th</sup> by the loss of a loved one went off-script; they did not perform their roles as they were meant to and by resisting this script they let us know as much about the prescribed text as they did about their own views.

If we understand national traumas and people’s response to them as involving performance, then it follows that performance (as we more traditionally understand performance to be defined) can be used to intercept and contradict these dominant performances. The Stonewalk journey was a type of performance meant to have an audience and meant to show a contradiction to the more widely seen “drama” surrounding September 11<sup>th</sup> that was taking place at the time. The members of this group took their identity as September 11<sup>th</sup> widows and orphans, as parents who lost children, as friends who lost friends and reclaimed their connection to September 11<sup>th</sup>. They understood from the beginning, when they

formed the group September 11<sup>th</sup> Families for Peaceful Tomorrows, that their loss at once belonged to them and simultaneously to the nation and to the world. But while they accepted that they would “share” their loss with many, they refused to accept the use of their loss to advocate decisions and rhetoric that they did not agree with.

In their performance, *Patriot Act*, Joe Shahadi and Toni Silver also refused to accept the role of an ideal citizen who, because of September 11<sup>th</sup>, would support legislation such as the US Patriot Act. In the performance the connection between September 11<sup>th</sup> and the Patriot Act is made clear; they take that connection and use it to argue against the Patriot Act. Shahadi and Silver were witnesses of September 11<sup>th</sup> and were traumatized by the event, and yet they do not equate that trauma with support for the Patriot Act. The timing of the performance, like that of Stonewalk, was meant to influence audiences who were getting ready for another Presidential election and to change the way the audience felt about Bush and the US Patriot Act. There was urgency to the performance that took its intentions “beyond” a desire to entertain, and into an explicit desire to effect social change.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Ruptures in the National Narrative about Hurricane Katrina

*Air Force One had a heck of a view  
Air Force One had a heck of a view  
Lookin' down on the patchwork  
Of the blue tarp blues*

*I went a walkin' through the water  
Sprung a leak in my shoe  
I went a walkin' through the water  
Sprung a leak in my shoe  
Well that hole in my sole  
Give me the blue tarp blues*

*I got the blues  
I got the blue tarp blues*

*There's a crack in the ceiling  
And the system too  
There's a crack in the ceiling  
And the system too  
But we got full coverage  
Of the blue tarp blues*

*I got the blues  
I got the blue tarp blues*

*No it wasn't the weather  
That sank me and you  
It was a bad mix of  
Politics greed and fools  
That levee of lies couldn't  
Hold back the truth  
We are in deep but not out of reach  
Throw me somethin' mister*

*I'm gonna fly my colors  
And watch for you  
I'm gonna fly my colors  
And watch for you  
Like a flag of hope  
Above the blue tarp blues*

*I got the blues*

*I got the blue tarp blues*

--Sonny Landreth, "Blue Tarp Blues" 2005

Hurricane Katrina appeared on the weather map on August 23, 2005 and was initially considered to be a relatively non-threatening Category 1 hurricane. However, within a few days Katrina had strengthened significantly and by the time it reached the Gulf Coast on August 29<sup>th</sup> it would become " [ . . . ] one of the deadliest and most costly hurricanes in U.S. history" (Levitt and Whitaker 1). The city of New Orleans saw some of the greatest damage and number of deaths within the Gulf Coast region.

Katrina arrived in New Orleans with force, and so did the mainstream media.<sup>9</sup> The media plays a vital role in a disastrous event, a role which sometimes, as Rukshana Ahmed describes in *Through the Eye of Katrina*, seems to receive more priority than needed relief and emergency aid: "Whenever disaster strikes, the news media seem to be the first to arrive. It seems that pictures of casualties and property loss emerge from the disaster zone before water, food, and emergency shelter [the blue tarp's of Sunny Landreth lament] go in" (Ahmed 187). Images of unimaginable devastation, like the images of the planes crashing into the World Trade Center, played in a nearly continual loop on the news, presenting to the world an unfolding drama that would involve heroism, the struggle for life and the loss of that battle. With these images were broadcast around the world, New Orleans became a place of interest and fascination for many, whether they had lived in, visited or knew someone in New Orleans, or not.

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<sup>9</sup> By mainstream media I mean sources such as CNN, MSNBC, CBS, etc.

Both from afar and for those closer to the geographical and cultural nexus of a crisis such as September 11<sup>th</sup> or Katrina, the public relies on the media to disseminate the reality of a situation. This reality is then formulated into a dramatic narrative that makes it comprehensible. As Ronald N. Jacobs points out in his introduction to *Race, Media, and the Crisis of Civil Society: From Watts to Rodney King*, the media creates a narrative for the public that, like a play, often follows a central plotline with a clear beginning, middle and end, features main and peripheral characters, and follows recognizable genre formats. In this way the media does more than represent society; through this dramatic representation, it actually teaches people how to view themselves and others.

As Patricia Leavy points out, the initial images and narratives created by dominant media outlets come to greatly shape how people come to know and understand an event and the narratives to which counter-narratives and those that are created later are compared (66). These media-created frames are not neutral; in fact they are often biased, inaccurate, and sensationalistic: “presented images are manipulated to tell a particular kind of story” (Ahmed 189), and that story is carefully crafted to keep people tuned in. The resulting narratives often uphold hegemonic structures, particularly regarding power and race, often omitting the perspectives and narratives of subjugated communities.

Not long after the storm passed, for example, rumors of mass crime including rape and vandalism dominated the media’s portrayal of New Orleans. “[. . .] New Orleans was presented as a disorganized city on the brink of collapse,

less from the storm than from its residents” (Dynes 25). According to Michael Dyson,

Television reports and newspaper accounts brimmed with the unutterable horror of what black folk were doing to each other and their helpers in the Superdome and the convention center: the rape of women and babies, sniper attacks on military helicopters, folk killed for food and water, armed gang members assaulting the vulnerable, dozens of bodies being shoved in a freezer. (170)

This negative portrayal of New Orleans not only had implications on race relations, but directly hindered rescue response efforts (fears of the violence dissuaded FEMA from entering the Superdome). The public was more likely to sympathize with this lack of effort because it saw a city “out of control” (Horne 109; Bierria 33), and not just a city out of control, but a city full of out of control black people. In other words, if people’s own racism did not already make them feel the black bodies they saw on television didn’t deserve rescue, the portrayal of black people in New Orleans as looters and criminals dehumanized them to the point that people watching the media could understand why rescue efforts were not taking place. Why, they might have asked, would you bother to rescue such a barbaric group of people? This is a reflection of a historical devaluation of the black body. As Henry Giroux states in his book *Stormy Weather: Katrina and the Politics of Disposability*, “The deeply existential and material questions regarding who is going to die and who is going to live in this society are now centrally determined by race and class” (10). In the United States, the black body has moved from its position of disposability as slave, to disposability when it suffers from poverty, crime and even the seemingly “natural” disaster of a hurricane. As

Jeremy I. Levitt and Matthew C. Whitaker note in the book they edited, *Hurricane Katrina: America's Unnatural Disaster*, "Hurricane Katrina revealed as much about American society and the inextricable link between race, class, gender and age in our nation as it did about nature's fury. Indeed, Katrina uncovered not only the devastating penalty for structural racism and classism but also their loathsome underbelly" (Levitt and Whitaker 3).

Media coverage not only feeds into pre-existent racism and stereotypes but creates an overall distancing effect between those who experience an event in person and those who do not. This is what Benjamin Bates and Rukhsana Ahmed refer to as the I-It relationship to survivors (187). They contend that the person who experiences a crisis or disaster through the media is kept at an emotional and physical distance from the perceived other. They write, "Instead of seeking a deep understanding of the other, media coverage allows us to observe the other from afar and keep ourselves out of moments of relationship with them as valued others" (187). In the case of Katrina, the media portrayed the African-American population as the Other, which created a sense of self for a white audience, placing them superior to the "animalistic" behavior they saw on television (Hurst 130).

The media portrayal of New Orleans as a city gone mad may be explained in part by the fact that before Hurricane Katrina New Orleans was, and continues to be, referred to as the least U.S. American city located in the United States. When Louisiana was a territory that extended from the Mississippi River to the Rocky Mountains, the site where New Orleans would become a city was nothing

more than seemingly uninhabitable swamplands. Nevertheless, de Bienville of France founded the city of New Orleans and named it after the Duke for whom he served, the Duke of Orleans. The city's origins were heavily influenced by French customs, architecture, language and laws. Though strategic because of its location near the Mississippi River and the Gulf, it was otherwise considered a city for the "undesirables" of France (including prostitutes and criminals) to be sent. In the 1760's, Louisiana was sold to Spain and the city's architecture and customs were then influenced by its new ruling country. Louisiana was given back to France by Spain and in 1803 Napoleon sold Louisiana to the United States. One of the factors that sets New Orleans apart among cities in the United States is its unique slave history.

While there were slaves in New Orleans, as there were in many other parts of the United States, the French and Spanish laws and attitudes regarding slavery meant that, unlike in other parts of the country, slaves were allowed to buy their freedom; thus New Orleans became one of the first cities in which previous slaves owned property, businesses and African derived ceremonies, music and food were integrated into the cultural landscape of the city. However, "despite the multiracial nature of the New Orleans heritage, the metropolis has been characterized by acute racial segregation" (Levitt and Whitaker 6). As Levitt and Whitaker note, "At the time of Katrina, according to the Brookings Institution, New Orleans was one of the most racially segregated among the largest U.S. metropolitan cities. Moreover, post-World War II suburbanization and white flight from the city's core led to the African Americanization of New Orleans"



(7). In addition to the city's French and Spanish heritage, its creole culture and unique mixtures of language, food and music, its predominantly black population likely contributes to the city's "outsider" status within its own nation. It is also possible that the very things that draw many of the city's visitors - its festivals and rituals - are the things that estrange New Orleans from those who live in communities with a much different understanding of the importance of performance and ritual as opposed to "everyday life." In other words, performance rituals such as those that take place during Mardi Gras simultaneously attract people to the city and create a perception of the city as strange and different from the rest of the country.

After a devastating event such as Hurricane Katrina, the importance of facilitating performance and preserving artistic heritage may come into question. However, in a city where performance is central to its identity and its multiple communities, returning to its performance roots was (and continues to be) a vital part of its general recovery from a disaster such as Hurricane Katrina. In this chapter I will examine the first Mardi Gras that took place after Hurricane Katrina and the play *The Breach*, written in 2006/2007 by Catherine Filloux, Tarell McCraney, and Joseph Sutton. Rather than look at these performances as alternative modes of communication, it is important to view them as primary modes of communication, part of a long tradition of performance as a site of knowledge and transmission as scholars including Joseph Roach and Diana Taylor have so eloquently described in their writing about performance and memory. I look at these performances as presenting important counter-narratives

to the dominant narratives created by the media, as outlets to vent frustrations that otherwise remained silenced, and as an opportunity to point to the liminal status of New Orleans as belonging to the country (which, I then argue, contributes to the yet to be determined status of Katrina as a national trauma).

As the time for the 2006 Mardi Gras approached, many people in and outside of New Orleans asked how Mardi Gras could take place in the midst of so much devastation. While the city was still physically devastated by the aftermath of Katrina and its inhabitants were just beginning to process the emotional and psychological damage they and their loved ones endured, it was in fact difficult to understand how people could put on costumes, decorate floats and parade down the streets that, just a few months prior, had been submerged in water. However, to examine the 2006 Mardi Gras and the history of Mardi Gras in New Orleans is to understand that festival and performance is so much a part of the individual and community identity that as part of the rebuilding process, there was no option *but* to go forward and have the parade that year.

*The Breach* engages with the national narrative created by the media in three important ways. First, through the character of the journalist, we see the process of how such narratives are written as we follow his journey where he attempts to distinguish truth from rumor and *he* is questioned by his interviewees. We may also view the character as a representative of the playwrights who, like many journalists, entered into New Orleans from an outside community to create their own narrative of what had taken place. Secondly, the play discusses historical moments that have been omitted from current discourse surrounding

Katrina but have direct bearing on what was taking place during the hurricane and its immediate aftermath. Lastly, through the performance of the play itself, be it in New Orleans (where the play premiered), in Seattle (January 2008), or New York (September 2008), audience members who most likely were not exposed to anything but the narrative presented by the media have access to this what Bechtel calls alternative knowledge.

### ***The Breach***

The creation of *The Breach* was inspired by the sensation that Sutton felt when he watched the events unfolding in front of him on television. He recalls, “I am watching television images of Hurricane Katrina, and I can’t believe what I’m seeing. How can we allow our own people [to] be treated like this in America? *What is happening?* . . . I have to do something. My first thought is to write a play” (Sutton 50). Sutton then contacted playwright Catherine Filloux who had experience in writing about human rights and genocide in such plays as *Eyes of the Heart*, *Lessons of my Father* and *Lemkin’s House*. The two were immediately conscious of their position as “outside writers”. Consequently they contacted Bill Rauch, the then artistic director of Cornerstone Theater Company, based in Los Angeles and well known for its community-based productions. Bill helped them develop community partnerships and guided them through the process of writing with multiple playwrights (Sutton 50).

Each playwright scripted his or her own distinct plotline and the three plotlines were then interwoven. Filloux concentrates on Mac, a bartender who finds himself floating through toxic waters, taunted by Water, a sensual and

seducing embodiment of the element for which she is named. Mac hallucinates that his son, currently serving in Iraq, will rescue him. For his part, McCraney imagined the interactions between family members as they waited on their rooftop to be rescued. For example, he has Pere Leon, the Grandfather in the family confront his grandson Severence about his sexuality while Quan, the youngest grandchild, watches. (Quan, we find out at the end of the play, is the only one who survives the ordeal). Finally, Sutton's plotline focuses on a journalist named Lynch who, like the playwrights, is confronted with the challenges of understanding and representing a community that is not his own. I will focus on this plot-line, since it most directly speaks to the narrative and history-making machine that takes place after events such as Hurricane Katrina, and also because this plot-line explores the historical precedents for what took place in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina.

Although not directly based on testimony, the play was greatly influenced by the playwrights' trips to the areas devastated by the Hurricane. In December of 2005, less than four months after the Hurricane, Sutton made his first visit to New Orleans:

Landing in New Orleans is surprising. Steeled as I am for the devastation, I see relatively little of it as we come in from the airport. But once we cross into the city proper, the collapsed houses and piles of debris come into view. . .It is almost four months after the storm, but it's as if it hit yesterday. . .I am in shock. I thought I was prepared. I wasn't. (Sutton 50)

On his trip, Sutton spoke with those who had experienced the events leading up to and during Katrina. Listening to these informal testimonies gave Sutton a sense

of urgency to write the play and gave him the inspiration for the format of the piece. He describes his experience: “I start to imagine an epic tale, told in a variety of voices, turned into a collage” (Sutton 51). He also decided to develop the play through a series of readings across the country which would then take into account the reactions they received from audience members. Though Sutton has not explicitly stated that his intention was to intervene in the media’s narrative, it is obvious that he was not satisfied watching Hurricane Katrina as it was presented by the media.

The format of the play, three interwoven narratives that are never connected by plot, and minimally by theme (Katrina), is in itself a form of resistance to a linear presentation of history, with one event leading to another. More important to the aims of this dissertation, the format also reflects the fragmented nature of trauma testimony. Many researchers on testimony including Alpert, Felman and Laub have observed that establishing the truth of an event through testimony is nearly impossible. Not only is testimony given by victims of trauma rarely completely accurate, but often human trauma cannot be retold in a complete, linear fashion; it is more often than not delivered in a fragmented way. The fragmented nature of the play reflects the difficulty trauma survivors have in repeating their story in a linear fashion and also resists the linear nature of the narrative created by the media.

In Sutton’s plotline, Lynch, a journalist from New York City, goes to New Orleans to “figure out what is going on there.” He goes there specifically to investigate rumors that the levees have been bombed. Lynch calls his boss (back

in New York) and informs him that he wants to find out if there is any truth to the rumors. In order to do this, he goes to interview the character “Woman” who is known as a source for “that kind” of information. When I saw *The Breach* produced in New Orleans, audience members whispered “Mama D” when they first were introduced to this character. “Mama D” is New Orleans resident and community leader Dyan French. She testified before the House Select Committee on Hurricane Katrina about the levees being bombed. “I was on my front porch. I have witnesses that they bombed the walls of the levee, boom, boom!” Mama D said, holding her head. “Mister, I’ll never forget it” (Myers). I imagine that since no real names were used in the play, the playwrights did not want to call this character Mama D, but by calling her Woman (although in some ways problematic<sup>10</sup>), audiences members familiar with Mama D could transpose her identity onto the nonspecifically named Woman. This allowed for the New Orleans audience members to imagine their own community members as being featured in the play; by calling out “Mama D” they indicated that even if they did not know for sure who Woman was meant to represent, they would take ownership of the role and imagine it in the way they wanted to.

As a New York journalist Lynch is, no matter what his intentions, viewed as an outsider in every way possible. When he attempts to interview Woman about the levee rumors he is very quickly reminded of this position. During their first encounter, Woman asks Lynch if she knows him. He says that she does not and that he is a writer. She asks him if he is from New Orleans and when he tells

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<sup>10</sup> Problematic since the anonymity of the name “Woman” reflects the anonymity of many of those seen on television as nameless victims or so-called looters after the storm.

her no, she tells him, “Well then you can’t understand this” (Filloux 39). On the surface, Lynch is not very different from the many journalists who came from outside the area to tell the story of what was taking place in New Orleans.

Woman very quickly turns the power dynamic between journalist and subject matter around by questioning *his* identity and *his* motivations. She wants to know why he wants to tell their story.

Lynch, like Sutton, is inspired by the rumors to find out what people are saying and why. In his attempts to find out what is or isn’t the “truth” about the levee rumors, Lynch encounters larger notions about the concept of a definable truth. What he discovers is that many members in the communities who were affected by the levee breach share Woman’s beliefs that the levees could have been bombed. This belief becomes more important to Lynch than whether or not they actually were bombed. Sutton like his own character of Lynch was immediately compelled to investigate these rumors. He says, “The levees in New Orleans were intentionally dynamited. That’s the rumor that many people in the region, on the Internet, as far away as Biloxi, seem to believe. What is behind that rumor? It is the question I decide to write about” (Sutton 52).

While rumors that people were raping babies and that massive looting and crime were taking place in New Orleans received mainstream media attention, rumors that the levees had intentionally been bombed did not. On a New Orleans-based website Greg Szymanski writes,

. . . whenever the subject of the levees being intentionally detonated comes up, most mainstream commentators like ABC’s Michele Martin, dismiss even the slightest possibility of foul play, appeasing Black listeners with

comments like ‘Anybody with any knowledge of history can understand why a lot of people can feel this way, but any real possibility that the levees were intentionally exploded must be dismissed. (Szymanski)

Although Martin acknowledges that there is historical reason for people to feel the way they do about the rumors, as a journalist she feels entitled to distinguish rumor from fact, and to expressly instruct people to dismiss them as rumors. This demonstrates the power of the media to disseminate to the American public what they should think and feel about disasters such as Katrina.

Although the MSNBC report does provide substantial information about these rumors, the framing of the article through its title (as investigating conspiracy theories) along with its minority status among the multiple reports about Katrina that did not cover the rumors, demonstrates that these rumors were not meant to be taken seriously within the larger narrative created about Katrina. Also, because the media had created a picture of New Orleans where people were engaged in criminal behavior, (looting, rape, etc), the credibility of those that asserted they heard some sort of explosion, or that they thought the levee had been bombed, was already compromised by the media. Leavy writes, “Within the commercial enterprise that is American news reporting, the press has a vested interest in capturing the imagination and legitimizing their spin on events for which they claim interpretive ownership” (2-3). In this case, the media had to legitimize the criminalization of black survivors of Katrina and also had to claim the ownership to determine what was “fact” from what was “fiction” within emerging narratives about Katrina.



In *The Breach*, at first Lynch is suspicious of what he hears about the potential levee bombings. It is clear that he believes the dissemination of rumors is dangerous. But during the course of the play he changes his mind and he eventually tells his editor,

Dick, listen; the poor, the dispossessed, the trapped in New Orleans were literally desperate for news. And during this time, the Times-Picayune wasn't publishing. The normal avenues weren't available. And so the people, in concert, working together, to save lives ...right? To save LIVES!...tried to puzzle things out. "What have YOU heard? This is what I'VE heard, what have YOU heard?" And in that process, DURING that process, this rumor we're discussing came out. It is just ONE of the rumors circulating, and who knows that it doesn't represent...in some larger sense...the real truth of what actually occurred. (Filloux 109)

In this quote we see that the people in New Orleans turn to rumor<sup>11</sup> for a very specific reason, including because of a lack of access to the mainstream media which would have been, at the time, constructing a very negative narrative about certain communities of New Orleans.

Even if a bomb did not actually blow up the levees, there were cultural ruptures and historical bombs that would allow such a rumor to be believed; these historical and societal injustices are important to the people Lynch interviews. While discussing the issue at a public talk in Seattle, Filloux noted, "The second you leave New Orleans, the notion that it's a rumor [the levees being bombed] seems to be so disturbing . . . we latch onto something that isn't really the point . . . the point is why do people believe this?" (Filloux). Filloux asks those of us in and outside of New Orleans to consider the rumors' basis in historical precedent and continued cultural subjugation. One such precedent took place in April of

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<sup>11</sup> My use of the term rumor here does not indicate a lack of truth, but rather information that is passed on between neighbors, communities, etc., as opposed to the media.

1927, when the Mississippi River was rising at an alarming rate and the flooding of the New Orleans area seemed imminent. As a result, sections of the levees were intentionally bombed, flooding out some of the poorer areas of New Orleans. Doug Brinkley, author of *The Great Deluge* and featured in Spike Lee's *When the Levees Broke* states,

These people that live along where it flooded that believe it was dynamited have a long experience of being ripped off. They, the 1927 flood when they, you know black communities were dynamited.<sup>12</sup> What happened during Betsy was on their mind. It's not a far jump to believe the urban myth that they got dynamited. (*When the Levees*)

The fact that the levees were bombed in 1927 is a point that Woman and her neighbors make numerous times in the play. She tries to explain to Lynch that to imagine that the levees had been bombed again in 2005 was not such a stretch of the imagination. It was also possible to imagine such a thing occurred because of a history of racism in the country. The incident of the Tuskegee experiments is also a historical moment that Woman describes to Lynch,

WOMAN: For forty years the United States Public Health Service conducted an experiment on black men. Black men with syphilis, the final stages of syphilis. And they did nothing to help them. They simply watched. They watched as men developed heart disease and tumors. Blindness, insanity. And then finally they died. Now this is a part of history. Not a part people talk about. But this is a part of history. (BEAT, MEANINGFULLY) You know? . . . And it all comes down to that. You know? What's important. What we talk about. (BEAT) What is history. (Filloux 105)

This quote not only provides information on the Tuskegee incident but it also speaks about how history is formulated. The Tuskegee incident was kept secret

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<sup>12</sup> This is debatable, the areas bombed in 1927 were not predominantly black, but were definitely poor.

from the public for nearly forty years and is a part of U.S. history that few are familiar with even after the information became public (Tuskegee). This is a part of history which is not part of the dominant narrative, the “official story.”

Though it does not directly relate to the rumors about the levees being bombed, it is part of a narrative that is often omitted from dominant historical narratives.

The passage also illuminates the larger history of racism against black people which, for some, made the thought of an intentional flooding of the black neighborhood of New Orleans not so unbelievable.

The presence of this theme, of the levees being bombed, was the most controversial issue when the play made its initial tours. At a discussion with audience members in Seattle, McCraney addressed this issue when an audience member asked him what caused the “strong responses” to the play when it was workshopped before its premiere in New Orleans. McCraney responded, “It was less about the play and more about the issues it evoked – the issues about the levee is a fault line that divides the community in half – there is no forum where people can talk about that so they’re walking around with that on their chest” (Filloux). The play, however, offers a forum for this dialogue both in the interactions between Lynch and Woman and for audience members who saw the play in both New Orleans and Seattle. The discussion of past historical moments also demonstrates that traumas are not isolated events that emerge out of a vacuum. History is often viewed as a timeline that moves forward inevitably with each event destined to happen in its time and place. But an alternative understanding of history as circular and repetitive is operative here, and tellingly,

that's how trauma works too. A traumatic event such as Hurricane Katrina has historical predecessors that for many make the event a repetition of previous events. For many, Katrina was an echo of events including Hurricane Betsy, the previous bombing of levees in New Orleans, and the historical dehumanization of the black body that took place during events such as the Tuskegee experiments and slavery. This is a point that is emphasized through the interactions between Lynch and Woman.

*The Breach* points to the concept that the construct of nation is divided within the U.S.. In the middle of an argument with his editor, Lynch declares "I...(THEN, IMPATIENTLY)...look, we live in two countries. We don't live in one country. We live in two countries. And I'm in the other one. And I'm getting a report" (46). Hurricane Katrina also brought up questions of citizenship and who is entitled to what in this country. The title "refugee" in order to describe those misplaced by the storm and its aftermath also raised eyebrows, since refugee is traditionally used to describe those who leave their country in order to seek refuge in another nation. After Katrina struck, President Bush made the comment, "'I know the people of this part of the world are suffering, and I want them to know that there's a flow of progress. We're making progress'" (Quoted by Kennedy in Kirk-Duggan 87). His phrasing, "in this part of the world" says something about the position of New Orleans as a city within and yet without<sup>13</sup> the United States. Calling it "this part of the world" made it seem as if it was in another country and not within the United States. One survivor of the storm stated,

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<sup>13</sup> I use the term "without" since the city was without the immediate aide and assistance of the nation in which it exists.

The nation paused on 9-11, but not now. No one cares about our losses. I am a homeowner who is homeless. I am a taxpayer and a voter. I placed my trust in the elected officials to do what is right, but instead we got nothing. We are not refugees, we are Americans. (Quoted by Harris-Lacewell in M and C 163)

The fact that this man has to state “we are Americans” speaks volumes as to the frustrations that New Orleanians and those throughout the gulf felt in regards to their status within their own nation. These experiences demonstrate the ways in which traumatic events expose who and who is not considered to be a part of the nation.

Another topic included in *The Breach* was the fact that while we were able to get our U.S. forces into Iraq to “democratize” their nation, we could not rescue our own citizens within our own nation. In her plotline Filloux has Mac’s son serving in Iraq. While swimming in toxic waters and fighting for his life, Mac hallucinates that his son rescues him. By creating this surreal moment, Filloux not so subtly makes the comment that were men like Mac’s son not in Iraq at the time, they could possibly have been saving their fathers, their brothers, their sisters, and their children in New Orleans. At the end of the play we discover that Mac has survived his ordeal and is back in the bar he owns, serving one of his regulars. Talking with her, he reveals that his son died while serving in Iraq (Filloux 123). Through the fictionalized death of this young man, Filloux keeps a “happy ending”, the resolution typical of many dramas, at an impossible distance - while the father survives, someone must die to pay the price for the decisions of the government and the Bush Administration. If it was not in New Orleans, it would be in Iraq – either way, people will die.

*The Breach* offers an alternative narrative to those that dominated the media after Hurricane Katrina. In Sutton's plotline, racial tensions and *whose* understanding of the events was to be foregrounded was made a major part of the plot. Returning to my introductory comments about the I-it relationship created by the media, I contend that watching a play such as *The Breach*, differs drastically from this media created construct not only because of the content of the play, but also because of the physical experience created in a theatrical space. Whereas watching someone on television drowning in water, an anonymous face of a person that we do not know can be heart-wrenching, it can also become numbing, especially when part of consecutive images, clips of devastating images with little context and then compounded by images of "looters" and "criminals." In contrast to that, watching a play like *The Breach* we become invested in just a few people's stories and we follow them on the journey that they take over the course of a play. For a few hours, our attention belongs to them and only them – turning the channel is not an option. The physical presence of someone telling their story, as opposed to an image of a body onscreen, also affects audience members. The emotions emitted from the actors on stage can be felt in the room, along with the emotions of fellow audience members. In one moment of the play, Woman's anger and deep sadness erupt when describing a woman whose neighbors evacuated at the same time as she did but did not survive. She says,

(BARELY CONTAINED) The nearness...the nearness of death. All around. (CRYING NOW) Needless death. Death caused by...caused by...(SHE STOPS, UNABLE TO FINISH.)  
LYNCH: Caused by what?

WOMAN: Man. It wasn't caused by nature. It was caused by man!  
(LONG PAUSE) Do you see what I'm sayin'? (Filloux 97).

In all three productions of the play that I saw, this line was delivered in a near-yell, with the actor's voice reverberating throughout the theater. Seeing or hearing someone cry out on television is a different experience than hearing and seeing that yell in the same space as you are. At the performance I watched in New Orleans, the emotional aspect of the performance was fortified by the fact that the actors and many of the audience members were New Orleans residents and had been personally affected by Katrina. Watching *The Breach* in that particular environment offered me a much more in-depth experience of witnessing what people must have experienced in those days leading up to and after the hurricane and failure of the levees than what I experienced watching the news or reading reports in newspapers.

*The Breach* in its multiple productions provided an opportunity for audience members both closely and not so directly linked to Hurricane Katrina. In New Orleans, when the play showed in 2007, communities were still coming together in New Orleans; people were just beginning to return to their homes and their neighborhoods. Theatre productions such as *The Breach* by the very virtue of their existence were a sign that communities were beginning to rebuild, that while life would not go back to normal, some of the joys and pleasures that once existed in the city would take place once more. For season ticket holders of Southern Repertory Theater, coming to the play offered an opportunity to see familiar faces, something that was very important in those years immediately

preceding Katrina. The content of the play sparked conversations between audience members who openly discussed their own experiences with Katrina with each other (comparing notes on their varying experiences) and with me (they seemed eager to explain elements of their experience that I may not have garnered from the news or other sources). In Seattle and New York, audience members were able, through talk-backs, to discuss some of the more contentious topics surrounding Hurricane Katrina and to ask panelists who were brought in as experts on various aspects of New Orleans and Katrina.

But McCraney stated that he did not write the play for New Orleans, because, “They have to live with Katrina every day” (Filloux). The play also had great potential for what it could do when performed outside of New Orleans. *The Breach* was produced by Seattle Repertory Theatre in January, 2008. Neither Seattle Repertory’s Artistic Director David Esbjornson, nor any of the actors in the production were from New Orleans. Esbjornson did not have actors use New Orleans accents and there did not appear to be an attempt to portray an “authentic” representation of New Orleans culture, beyond what was written into the dialogue of the play. The physically striking Nike Imoru, who played the role of Water in Filloux’s plotline, spoke with her own undisguised British accent. Actor John Aylward, who is known for his success in Hollywood as well as his multiple roles at Seattle Rep, is recognized as a beloved Seattle resident. While audience members in New Orleans nodded their heads in acknowledgement of and recognition of the rumors that the levees had been intentionally bombed, for



audience members in Seattle this information varied from the “as seen on TV” version of Katrina.

In a brilliant publicity move, in addition to a seemingly genuine attempt to include members of the New Orleans community with the production, Seattle Repertory Theater invited New Orleans resident and author Chris Rose, (*I Dead in Attic*) to participate in multiple pre-show events. Rose’s celebrity status as one of the most well-known writers of post-Katrina literature brought Seattle residents to these events where they had the opportunity to learn more about New Orleans and Hurricane Katrina and were encouraged to buy tickets to the show. Rose and all three playwrights spoke together at Elliot Bay Bookstore in Seattle, lending credibility to the playwrights’ portrayal of Rose’s beloved city, in spite of their status as outsiders. Rose’s humorous and sometimes heart-breaking readings from his book reminded those at the reading, many of whom would then be part of the play’s audience, of the ongoing emotional toll of Katrina for residents of New Orleans. In a *Times-Picayune* article, Rose writes about his experience there in Seattle:

I was in Seattle. And, not long before my trip, that national poll came out showing that close to a third of Americans think New Orleans still is under water, so I guess I was prepared for my share of uninformed inquiry. And I got just that, the now-predictable range of comments from New Orleans being unlivable and uninhabited to everything being honky-dory and up-and-running. (Rose 1)

Rose went on to say that the media will now relegate its discussion about Katrina to a once-a-year memorial type report, that art, theatre included, will now be the

“second wave of information” for those who did not experience Katrina in person (1).

In *Archive and the Repertoire*, Taylor writes, “Performances may not, as Turner had hoped, give us access and insight into another culture, but they certainly tell us a great deal about our desire for access, and reflect the politics of our interpretations” (6). The audiences that come to see the performance of *The Breach* when it travels outside of New Orleans may demonstrate a “desire for access” to New Orleans and what was experienced during Katrina. In this case, this access will not only be an access to the culture of New Orleans, but also access to an alternative truth to the dominant narrative that most are familiar with. As an audience member stated after a workshop performance of *The Breach* that took place in Florida, “I only knew Katrina from CNN, from a distance. You let me see it from up close” (Sutton 53). This quote speaks to the play’s ability to offer something more to audience members than what they received from CNN and other mainstream media sources. The fact that the audience member felt he was seeing the event “from up close” also demonstrates the play’s ability to *do* more than watching the event on television, which for at least that audience member, created a distance between him and the events unfolding before him.

Of the three productions, those in New Orleans and New York seemed the most successful in terms of countering the experience of watching events unfold on television. At first I believed that this might be a result of the play traveling out of the site of the original trauma, outside of New Orleans. But the New York reading seemed to return more to what I experienced as an audience member in

New Orleans. Though the New Orleans production was distinct in that it took place at the site of trauma it did have a few important things in common with the production in New York that did not exist in Seattle which may help us understand how empathy and compassion may be created in the theatre. In both cases the size of the theatre and audience was relatively small and the space felt intimate, whereas in Seattle the size of the house was significantly larger. The production budgets in New Orleans and New York were also small, compared to Seattle (with the one in New York being quite minimal since it was a staged reading and not a full production). Whereas in Seattle the audience was drawn towards more elaborate stage and costume design, in addition to a pool which held over six thousand gallons of water – in New Orleans and New York the staging and theatre spaces focused the audience more on the words of the play. The spectacle of the performance in Seattle was similar in ways to the spectacle created by the media. The performances in New York and New Orleans with their more intimate, “personal” feel contrasted the experience of watching Katrina on the television.

Choosing to stage a play like *The Breach*, which directly addresses a traumatic event, is a challenge to producers, actors, directors, and audience members to look at their desires to understand trauma. Though such an understanding is impossible and to assume otherwise is problematic, I do believe that the desire for understanding does exist. Part of what one desires to understand of another’s trauma is what it “felt” like to endure that trauma. And though a director or producer might agree that full understanding of such an

experience is not possible, the creation of some level of understanding, sympathy and empathy would likely be part of the goal of the production, particularly when the performance is representing trauma. One of the goals of the production of *The Breach*, according to the playwrights, was to “keep the spotlight on New Orleans.” Creating an emotional impact on audience members and/or creating an emotional “connection” with what they have seen on stage is one way to “keep the spotlight on” the city and those there who still needed support.

### **Bare Breasts and Social Change: The First Mardi Gras After Hurricane Katrina**

The history of Mardi Gras in New Orleans reflects the complex political and cultural trajectory of a place that has Native American, Spanish, French, Haitian, African, Italian, Irish, German and Portuguese influences, among others. Under Spanish rule, the predecessor of Mardi Gras emerged in the form of masked public balls that quickly became ‘an important component of the cultural life of New Orleans’ (Fox Gotham, 24). Later, Spanish rulers decided that the mixing of various classes and races during the balls would ‘encourage revolt and lead to criminal behavior’ (Fox Gotham, 24). When the United States assumed control of New Orleans in 1805 public masked balls were banned; this is an early indication of the tension between more puritanical U.S. American customs and a town that would exist within and yet always outside of this culture.

In the 1820s, after the ban was lifted, masked balls began to develop and were more associated with Carnival. In 1857, the Mystick Krewe of Comus, held the first themed parade and ball – beginning the tradition of planned parades,

krewe. Henceforth, carnival organizations and private clubs that had ‘clearly defined leadership structure, committee system, and secret rites of passage’ were known as ‘krewes’ (Fox Gotham, 31). These krewes also gave a sense of organization and order to Mardi Gras. ‘By restricting participation and developing planned tableaux and costumes, the old-line krewes aimed to eliminate the aura of spontaneity and promote order through a controlled procession’ (Fox Gotham, 32). This ordered and controlled Mardi Gras was advertised as a safe and fun activity for all to participate in; it was then that Mardi Gras became a tourist attraction for white visitors to New Orleans who associated with the white upper-class krewe members. However, amidst this organized and controlled environment, role-reversals, transgressions and political commentary have and continue to take place within and outside of the Mardi Gras krewes.

There has always been a large difference between the projected images of Mardi Gras and New Orleans and the realities of the festival and place beloved to its inhabitants. News reporter Ken Ringle writes, ‘TV cameras are always drawn to the drag queens, vomiting drunks and bare breasts on display in the French Quarter, usually by tourists. But Mardi Gras in New Orleans has almost always been more about neighborhoods and families’ (2006). While those on the outside of New Orleans and Louisiana may associate Mardi Gras and New Orleans itself with bare breasted women drunkenly meandering down Bourbon street, those who live in the region understand that Mardi Gras is much more complicated than that. Writing about Cajun Mardi Gras in Western Louisiana, Carolyn Ware notes, ‘For many Cajun women and men, Mardi Gras is not simply a once-a-year

diversion, it is a deeply meaningful part of their religious, ethnic, regional, and community identity' (3). This statement could be made for many who reside in areas and/or belong to Mardi Gras groups (such as the Mardi Gras Indians) whose celebrations of Mardi Gras do not come close, literally or figuratively, to the Bourbon Street mayhem that many of us imagine when we think of this annual celebration.

During the 2006 Mardi Gras, a number of krewes took advantage of the opportunity to comment on their frustrations with what had taken place in their city before, during and after Katrina. They also directly criticized certain politicians and organizations that they felt had failed in their jobs and responsibilities to the city. Two krewes that exemplify this critique are Krew de Vieuw and Mid-City. The Krewe de Vieux, which is known according to their website, for keeping the 'original' purpose of Mardi Gras by having satirical themes (Krewe de Vieux website) made their theme 'C'est Levee', playing on the French term, 'C'est la Vie' or 'That is life.' The Krewe of Carrollton's theme was the 'Blue Roof Blues' referencing the blue tarps that FEMA provided in order to 'protect' people's homes from further water damage. These tarps arrived after homes had already been destroyed. The tarps had become an iconic image of the post-Katrina Gulf Coast region. Mid-City parade had a theme of 'New Orleans Culture' - culture as in mold (msnbc) and 'I drove my Chevy to the levee but the levee was gone.' They also reused a float with an image of Willy Wonka, in reference to Mayor Nagin's comments that New Orleans was a 'chocolate city.' These themes demonstrate the groups' willingness to directly confront some of

the more contentious topics surrounding Katrina including government failure, and the controversial remarks of their mayor. While making more pointed criticisms, they simultaneously maintained the sense of humor and irony that reflects the culture of New Orleans.

In the midst of this type of humor and celebration, the recognition of loss and the expression of grief were displayed when krewes took the opportunity to hold memorials for those they had lost. The Zulu club created a memorial by lighting ten candles for the ten members of the club that died during the storm and a candle for the many non-members who died as well (msnbc). For some, Mardi Gras might not appear an appropriate venue for memorialization, however in New Orleans, a city that regularly performs grief via events such as jazz funerals and second-line parades, these displays of loss in the midst of revelry and celebration made perfect sense.

Individual participants not associated with specific krewes also created costumes that expressed their personal perspectives on the storm and its aftermath.



Louisiana State Museum, "20060301\_MG\_0502.jpg." *Hurricane Digital  
Memory Bank*, Object #2629 (August 21 2006, 12:10  
pm)<http://www.hurricanearchive.org/object/2629>





Louisiana State Museum, "20060301\_MG\_0497.jpg." *Hurricane Digital*

*Memory Bank*, Object #2628 (August 21 2006, 12:10

pm)<http://www.hurricanearchive.org/object/2628>

Above is an example of the use of costume to address iconic images and issues surrounding Hurricane Katrina. One woman has made a hat to look like the blue tarps that were distributed by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Poking out of the top of the tarp covered roof is a small figure representing someone who has managed to climb to their roof. The figure's arms are outstretched in a gesture mimicking those who, in real life, were waving their

arms in the air begging for rescue. On the top and front part of her hat is a red X with the number one next to it. This symbol references the markings that were painted on people's homes after they had searched for survivors or bodies. The numbers represented the number of bodies (those of human and animals) and the date that it was checked. The parade participant has also painted this X on her cheek, like a badge of honor representing what she had endured. The miniaturization of a scene familiar to many performs multiple functions; it reminds people of the horrific scenes that had taken place in the city not that long before (a reminder those in New Orleans did not need but for those outside of New Orleans may have been more affected by) and it also demonstrates the absurdity and spectacular nature of what took place in the aftermath of the storm. A second participant is dressed as a witch (a term often used to describe Katrina) with a clear message about the correlation between the destruction of Louisiana wetlands and Katrina – a message that takes on new meaning and relevance after the 2010 oil disaster in the Gulf. Through the identifiable character of a witch, and what witches represent, she is able to make a political statement about the connection between environmental issues and hurricanes.

Audience, which has long been an essential part of the Mardi Gras experience (Ware 118), would be even more vital when all eyes were on New Orleans post-Katrina. During this Mardi Gras there would be an audience of those who were there to see the event in person, and those who would tune in their televisions to see how New Orleans and the larger Gulf Coast Region was doing nearly half a year after Katrina. An important element of this Mardi Gras

was the message it would send to the nation about New Orleans's recovery. In an interview about the 2006 Mardi Gras, Reed stated, 'I mean, you know, it would send – there's nothing associated with New Orleans as Mardi Gras the world over. So I think if you say, OK, we're just going to throw in the towel this year. I really think it would send a signal to the rest of the country, to Washington in particular, to the world, that we're giving up' (CNN 2006). Douglas Brinkley made a similar statement, 'And so Mardi Gras is a sign to the world, we're back, we've picked ourselves up; we've got a long ways to go, but we're not quitters' (CNN 2006). These quotes demonstrate the pressure on New Orleanians to use the 2006 festival as a statement to the nation and to the world about the progress they were making in their recovery. This Mardi Gras became a national and international performance that would feature an audience of people eager to view the city six months after the storm. Public performances such as Mardi Gras, have intended audiences ranging from the small and intimate, to the most distant of viewers. After New Orleans had been placed on what I call the "national stage" during Hurricane Katrina, participants in this Mardi Gras, whether they cared to play to the larger audience or not, had to be aware of its presence.

In addition to defending their city, participants of this Mardi Gras were presented with the opportunity to counter the dominant media narratives that emerged about New Orleans immediately after Hurricane Katrina, described earlier in the chapter. For some participants in the 2006 Mardi Gras, their concern was not focused on the audience of the general U.S. public, nor was it about the valuable tourist dollars that would be brought in by holding the parade. This

Mardi Gras was about sending a message to those displaced by Katrina, scattered throughout the country as nearby as Houston and as far away as Seattle. Ringle notes, “That’s the real imperative for holding Mardi Gras this year. Far more than the tourist dollars it attracts will be the signal it sends to those there and those absent alike that New Orleans is still alive, partying defiantly amid the pain” (2006). Those displaced by Katrina may not have been able to join in the festivities directly, but by tuning into CNN or MSNBC, networks where months earlier they were barraged by images of devastation, New Orleanians would see an image of their city evoking joyful memories. For them, the Mardi Gras experience that had once united families, churches, communities and strangers, could unite again even if from afar and through a television.

National media reports emphasized the unifying nature of the 2006 Mardi Gras. Ringle writes, “What’s remarkable about Mardi Gras in New Orleans is the extent to which the entire city has institutionalized this defiant laughter, so that every class, race and condition shares it” (2). But while Mardi Gras might have been celebrated across class and racial divides, Mardi Gras, like Katrina, was not experienced in the same way by all. In the article, “Hero, Eulogist, Trickster and Critic: Ritual and Crisis in Post-Katrina Mardi Gras” Chelsey Louise Kivland uses the figures in her title to better understand the individual performances of specific communities in New Orleans within the larger overall performance of Mardi Gras. She argues that the Rex parade, the white, upper-class Krewe of Mardi Gras performed the role of the hero, with the group serving as a symbol of renewal and rebuilding (the dominant theme of their floats) (109). However, as

Kivland points out, this assertion is highly racialized. As the white, more privileged class of New Orleans, this group felt inherently more able to re-establish New Orleans – a type of manifest destiny, expanding imperialism as necessary and benevolent. Fox Gotham notes “The different meanings and pressures of “recovery” and “rebuilding” are not distributed equally but signify entrenched inequalities and power relations” (198). Kivland writes, “The parade’s enactment of a kinship between the thematic statement of civility and the honors it bestows expressed the performers’ claim to a dignified social status. The cultural exaltation of royal culture concealed the parade’s racially segregationist practices by eliding the language of race for that of civility” (109). The white carnival krewe that, since its inception, had represented civility and order within the Mardi Gras tradition now presented themselves as having the civility that it would take in order to rebuild the city. This mirrored the racism prevalent in media reports that captioned black people as looters and whites as trying to survive and get food for their families. Being white was associated with being civil and having the ability and the right to negotiate the rebuilding of the city, which whether intended or not, had a very particular implication given the racial tension surrounding the events of Katrina.

The Zulu parade, which has long been a “counter” parade to the Rex parade,<sup>14</sup> had a theme of “Leading the Way Back Home.” According to Kivland, the ‘message’ of their parade, which included stops at the Convention center, was that in order to rebuild the community of New Orleans (understood to be a black

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<sup>14</sup> For further information on this see Joseph Roach’s *Cities of the Dead* and Reid Mitchell’s *All on a Mardi Gras Day*.

community), those that had been displaced would have to return. She refers to the Zulu parade as the Eulogist since it included memorials for those lost and the recognition that renewal and regeneration could not take place without remembering those who were absent. The differences between these two groups' themes are indicative of a much larger division in the rebuilding, revitalization and restoration of New Orleans. Many city leaders, politicians and real-estate developers openly declared their intentions to take advantage of the displacement of the black, poor population of New Orleans, to keep them out and to develop expensive homes where affordable housing was once available, making it difficult if not impossible for many to return to New Orleans. By emphasizing the importance of the return of their community, specifically the black community, the Zulu parade created a counter-narrative not only to the Rex parade, but also to all of those who not only dismissed the importance of the return of *all* New Orleans residents to New Orleans, but actively stood in the way of their return.

The Trickster emerged in the form of a group of men who wore T-shirts with logos that explicitly stated their anger and frustrations.

From the end of the main thoroughfare of the parades, an oncoming group of ten or more black men walking in uneven, but discernable lines with a steady, measured beat approaches the crowds of the mainline parades. The coordinated 'black mob,' as one beholder calls it, moves against the stationary, mostly white crowds of tourists and locals, drawing the attention of all those they pass over and around. Long after the disruption passes, the striking commentary of the T-shirts that each marcher wears remains. Their white T-shirts boldly display the words "Willy Nagin and the Chocolate City, Semi-Sweet and a Little Nuts" surrounded by the mayor digitally rendered in the costume of "Willy Wonka," complete with cane, top hat, and three-piece suit. (Kivland 112)

Again, race and racial divides plays into this ‘performance.’ The group of men stood out against the group of predominantly white spectators because they break the ‘unofficial’ official rules of segregation that dominate the Mardi Gras experience. This rupture of protocol is in and of itself a performance. Furthermore, the messages on their shirts as Kivland points out, remain even after the performers had passed by. In addition to challenging racial divides, this performance questioned the reliance on tourism in order to rebuild New Orleans – since slogan T-shirts are a popular purchase item for tourists (Kivland 113).

Today, nearly five years after Katrina, t-shirts like these have become commonplace in most tourist shops in the French Quarter. Kivland’s observations illuminate the discord between the national perception of events and local realities. While the national media portrayed Mardi Gras as an emotional break or release from recent events, with unification of communities and people of all races and classes coming together to celebrate, just as racial and class divides greatly contributed to the events surrounding Katrina, so too did they effect first Mardi Gras after Katrina. Some groups, who made themselves into performers, such as the T-shirt brigade as Kivland refers to them, directly confronted those racial tensions. The use of performance and local traditions confronted the ironies and tensions that percolated in communities, especially those communities most affected by government neglect and the failure of the levees.

## **Conclusion**

Katrina's liminal position between natural disaster and national trauma tells us much about what distinguishes national traumas as such and demonstrates the way the positioning of an event as a national trauma, or not, is an inherently political event. Limiting the understanding of Katrina as a natural disaster ignores the fact that much of the death and devastation that took place after Katrina had little to do with the storm itself, but rather with the failure of local and federal government systems to address contributing factors to the disaster including levees that were known to be insufficient if the city ever encountered a direct hit from a major hurricane. Referring to Katrina as a natural disaster and not a national trauma also makes a clear statement about who is and who is not considered part of the nation. While the victims of September 11<sup>th</sup>, mostly white, middle to upper-class business people served as the ideal sympathetic victim in a nation that idealizes whiteness and capitalism, the working-class and poor black victims of Hurricane Katrina did not. How Hurricane Katrina will be framed within the historical U.S. American narrative is yet to be determined, but this framing will have long-term implications for those who experienced Katrina and for the nation as a whole.

National traumas do not "happen" as such, they are created. Part of this creation is the construction of "official" and dominant narratives about the trauma, which in turn influences how people come to understand, think about and know those traumas. The media plays a vital role in the process of constructing what is considered to be an "official" account of an event such as Hurricane Katrina. This history is meant to be a fixed, linear and complete account of what



has happened during an event. When Hurricane Katrina devastated the areas of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast, the media arrived, as it often does to “capture” the moment of crisis and to broadcast to the larger public, what was “really happening” on the ground, providing “insider” knowledge to those on the outside. In the case of Hurricane Katrina a narrative was created which criminalized an already subjugated black population of New Orleans, portraying them as animalistic. This focus on the negative not only upheld negative stereotypes about this group of people, but dissuaded immediate rescue attempts and justified delayed rescue attempts which may also have been motivated by racism and cultural prejudice. The narrative created by the mainstream media left little room for counter-narratives including rumors that the levees had intentionally been bombed. While stories that focused negative attention on blacks received major attention in the mainstream media, those that exposed a history of racism did not receive equal attention.

The playwrights of *The Breach* directly intervened in the dominant narratives created by the media by featuring with such prominence the rumors about the levees and explaining the historical framework, and societal experiences from which these rumors emerged. The struggles between Lynch and Woman, her mistrust of him as an outsider, and a journalist and her later attempts to explain to him why the rumors exist is a reflection of the frustration that some New Orleans residents felt when they saw their community members so negatively portrayed in the media and when their own voices were not represented in the media. Counter-narratives against the mainstream media’s narrative were

not given voice on most major television broadcasts, but their voice is represented in the play. This as Taylor, Conquergood and Bechtel suggest is part of a long tradition of performance as a site of resistance against “official” and hegemonic narratives. When *The Breach* is performed outside of New Orleans in venues such as Seattle Repertory, a theme that I will explore in the final chapter of the dissertation, this counter-narrative will be shared with audience members both familiar and unfamiliar with this alternative narrative giving the opportunity for under-represented voices to be heard. The physical experience of witnessing bodies on the stage and being in the theatre space with a community of people also having this experience creates a unique counter experience to understanding Katrina through the media.

Cultural anthropologists and performance scholars have theorized that festivals such as Mardi Gras extend beyond the superficial reputation they hold as an excuse to get drunk, enact repressed sexual desires and overall to let go of everyday decorum; festivals hold the potential for social commentary and social change. Fu-Kiau Bunseki points out, “ ‘Festivals are a way of bringing about change. People are allowed to say not only what they voice in ordinary life but what is going on in their minds, their inner grief, their inner resentments. . . . Parades see true meaning’ ” (quoted in Nunley and Bettelheim, 23). While putting on masks and costumes, elements that seem to cover up, figuratively and literally masking one’s identity, in fact emotions that are covered up and masked during “every day” life are suddenly revealed. Specifically speaking about Mardi Gras and festival in New Orleans, Joseph Roach points out, ‘Both carnival and the law

have operated as agents of cultural transmission, especially in conserving the exclusionary hierarchies, of the social elite, yet both have also served as instruments of contestation and change. . . ' (243). These two seemingly contradictory sentiments about Mardi Gras were especially true in 2006. On the one hand, people expressed their frustrations with seemingly racist and classist responses to the people of New Orleans during and after Katrina and yet at the same time the 2006 Mardi Gras was no exception to a tradition historically riddled with ethnic tensions, racism, sexism and classism. During a time when many in New Orleans were still undergoing extreme trauma as a result of Hurricane Katrina, the opportunity to voice their frustrations at slow governmental response, insurance companies, dealing with family members scattered throughout the country and neighborhoods that still looked as if the storm had just passed, presented itself in a tradition that had taken place nearly every year since the early 1800's.

### **Coda**

As further testament to the power of performance and its potential to create change and serve as a site for protest, performers have taken an interesting hit after Hurricane Katrina. Since 2005, there are new fees which penalize musicians for performing on the street without a permit. The Mardi Gras Indians have been fighting against increasing fees which they have to pay in order to march on the streets during Mardi Gras and places such as Congo Square, an iconic place where slaves once gathered to dance and sing and has since become a cultural and community center primarily for New Orleans's black population, was

inexplicably shut down and closed off to the public after Katrina (it has since reopened. Some could argue that these are coincidental casualties of a devastated economy. However, one cannot help but feel that there is something else going on – that policy makers, like real estate moguls pouncing on the opportunity to develop land, have used Katrina as an excuse to implement restrictions and social crack-downs that they have been waiting to make long before Katrina. I have heard many of my colleagues ask how we can create a culture in this nation that understands the importance and power of the arts. I believe that people, particularly people in positions of power, are perfectly aware of its power – which is precisely why we see an ever increasing decrease of funding for the arts and the disappearance of arts programs in the public school system. Despite the obstacles placed before them, artists, musicians, theater practitioners, performance artists, dancers and community leaders are using the arts in exciting and innovative ways to respond to Katrina and to rebuild communities, in addition to addressing societal issues that existed prior to Katrina such as poverty, racism, corruption and a terrible education system.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Memory, Performance and Nation: The Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation

#### Commission and Grupo Cultural Yuyachkani

“The memory needs anchors: Places and dates, commemorative monuments, rituals. Sensoral stimulations, a smell, a noise, an image – can trigger memories and emotions.” ~ From a painted passage in the courtyard of Grupo Cultural Yuyachkani, during their performance of their piece *Sin Titulo*.

I am standing in the courtyard of Grupo Cultural Yuyachkani’s theater space. Looking at a banner hanging on the wall I try to decipher the Spanish. I don’t have much time to translate because soon the audience is being motioned through a doorway into a dark hallway. The audience is being moved simultaneously through space and time. In the courtyard we existed in the present; in the hallway we become observers of the past. The narrow hallway is lined with glass boxes filled with books containing pictures and words that represent Peru’s history. The construction of history in Peru has been and continues to be complicated, as in many other countries, because of its colonized past. When we walk into Yuyachkani’s sala, the space where they present many of their plays, we enter not into a theater but into a museum, a history book, a representation of the past.

The play we were about to see, *Sin Titulo* (Without Title), not only represents history but also examines the very way in which history is constructed. The play was created by Yuyachkani after they accompanied the Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission as the commissioners traveled throughout the Peruvian Andes, collecting testimonies regarding the events of the Peruvian Guerra Sucia (Dirty War), which ranged from the years 1980 to 2000. While one of the Commission's objectives was to establish the evidential facts of these events, they also sought to acknowledge publicly the loss of life that had occurred in this time period and to open up a space for healing both at a personal and a national level. Performance played an integral role in this process.

If, as Maurice Stevens suggests, national traumas can be viewed as productive events, then TRCs can be read as part of the productive value of traumatic events. In particular, they play a critical role in rebuilding and/or restoring a sense of nationhood after a national trauma and perhaps creating a new definition of nation or nationhood that may be equally as problematic as the previous constructions were. In this chapter I will look at the role the Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission played in (re)constructing the concept of the Peruvian nation after the as well as the complicated process that both created an idea of a new more democratized nation, while simultaneously creating new dominant narratives and national ideals.

The work of Yuyachkani reflects their own complicated relationship with the TRC and the evolving definition of nation in Peru. The work of a TRC can never fully represent or compensate for the traumatic events that have taken place

in a country, nor can they be held fully responsible for the work that must be done in order to prevent similar acts of violence from taking place again. Theatre and performance, both through its content and theme, can fortify the work of these Commissions. In this chapter I will describe the ways that Yuyackani's work supplemented what the Commission could not or simply did not do in their own work.

According to the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the following statistics demonstrate the level of violence that took place during this period of time: 1) An estimated 69, 280 Peruvians died between the years of 1980 and 2000; 2) 79 percent of these victims lived in rural areas; 3) 75 percent of the victims spoke Quechua (TRC General Conclusions, Section I).<sup>15</sup> The indigenous peoples of Peru, who made up the largest percentage of the victims of these two decades, had in fact been socially victimized long before that: denied documentation and without proof of citizenship, for all intents and purposes nearly two million Peruvians had no identity within the nation. (Degregori). The socially performed national identity of Peruvians included the Spanish-mestizos and white/Europeans and blatantly excluded the indigenous population. The great cultural divide between the indigenous population and non-indigenous Peruvians created vulnerability in the nation whereby the violence could and did ignite. Sofia Macher, one of the founding members of the TRC, remarked that "[t]he violence of these 20 years took place as a result of systemic widespread poverty, social marginalization, discrimination and racism – a context that has changed

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<sup>15</sup> This translation is done via the website (there is an English and Spanish version published online of the report).

little since the transition to democracy more or less put an end to the conflict” (Libertas Rights and Democracy 2). Like the events surrounding Hurricane Katrina, the Dirty War in Peru also centered around racism, systemic discrimination and complicated notions of citizenship. The findings of the Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission demonstrate that what took place during the Dirty War was not isolated to the twenty year period of the war but was a reflection of pre-existing racism which left the indigenous population of Peru invisible on the national stage of Peruvian identity and belonging. This invisibility made their lives, like the lives of the black population of New Orleans, disposable.

The Shining Path is one of the groups most responsible for the devastation inflicted during the war. The group developed in 1970 under the leadership of Professor Abimael Guzmán. Based on Maoist communistic ideals, the movement gained its momentum with students in the university systems. These students were ideal candidates to join such a movement; they were young, impressionable, and eager to create change in a political system which used oppression to dominate its subjects. Guzmán declared that the group’s destiny was to ““Rise in revolution to put the noose around the neck of imperialism and the reactionaries, seizing and garroting them by the throat”” (qtd. in Starn, Degregori and Kirk 306.) This passage from Guzmán’s speech “We Are the Initiators”, given in 1980, illuminates the violent nature of the organization and exposes what is perhaps the greatest irony of the Shining Path, that the violence and tyranny they sought to destroy, was soon to become their own creation.



During the 1980's the group began its more violent movements in the southern regions of the Andes and the villages of Ayacucho, Huancayo and eventually Lima (Starn, Degregori and Kirk 306).<sup>16</sup> The Shining Path was found to be responsible for 54 percent of the deaths that occurred during the two decades of violence. In the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's final report, the following analysis of the Shining Path was presented:

1)The TRC has proven that the PCP-SL [The Shining Path] deployed extreme violence and unusual cruelty, including torture and brutality as forms of punishing or setting intimidating examples within the population they sought to control; 2) The TRC believes that the PCP-SL rested its project on an ideology that was fundamentalist in character, centered on a rigid preconception of the unfolding of history, confined in a vision of political action that was solely strategic and, thus, at odds with all humanitarian values; 3) The TRC has determined that, in accordance with its ideology, the PCP-SL, adopted a strategy that consciously and constantly sought to provoke disproportionate responses by the State without taking into consideration the profound suffering this caused to the population for which it said it was fighting. (TRC General Conclusions, Section II, A)

The Shining Path did not create a utopia in which the oppressed could rise against imperial rule and domination. Instead of creating a shining path, they created a path of destruction, death and devastation. They were not, however, the only group responsible for the tens of thousands of deaths which occurred during this time period.

In 1984 a second militaristic group, the MRTA, formed its own violent opposition to the State. The MRTA differed from the Shining Path because "The

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<sup>16</sup> It is important to note that the violence did not reach the capital city of Lima until the very end of the 20 years of violence. Limeños are considered to be the cultural elite of Peru with the majority of the population composed of mestizos (Spanish speaking and with Spanish inheritance). Because the violence did not affect them until the end, and up until then primarily affected the indigenous populations in the Andes and the jungle, those that did have the power to "do something" about the violence either did not know about it, or chose to ignore it.

MRTA claimed responsibility for its actions, its members used uniforms, or other identifiers to differentiate themselves from the civilian population, it abstained from attacking the unarmed population and at some points showed signs of being open to peace negotiations” (TRC General Conclusion, Section II, par 34).

Despite their difference in approach from the Shining Path, the MRTA is also responsible for a number of deaths in Peru, according to the TRC totaling 1.5% of the victim deaths. In addition, according to the TRC, “MRTA’s discourse and actions contributed to creating a climate in which the use of violence sought to appear to be a legitimate political recourse, ultimately fostering the actions and expansion of the Shining Path” (TRC General Conclusions, Section II, par35).

The people who lived in the rural villages of Peru were caught in the cross-fires of these two groups. If they were not victims of the violence, they were recruited (often forcefully) by not just one but two groups to become actively involved in the violence. Men, women and children took arms to either join the groups or protect themselves from them, and violence abounded.

In response to the actions of the Shining Path and the MRTA, the Peruvian military began its own campaign of terror against its own inhabitants (those who were legally considered citizens and those who were denied that legal privilege). This campaign, while eventually successful in suppressing the Shining Path and the MRTA, created terror amongst the people and indiscriminately victimized those they were supposedly protecting from terrorist organizations. Those accused of terrorist activity were tortured, killed and raped, punishment inappropriate for those guilty of that which they were accused and undeniably

unjust for those with no affiliation to the MRTA and Shining Path organizations.

In the final report issued by the TRC, the analysis of the military's actions

included the following points:

1)The TRC affirms that at some places and moments in the conflict, the behavior of members of the armed forces not only involved some individual excesses by officers or soldiers, but also entailed generalized and/or systematic practices of human rights violations that constitute crimes against humanity as well as transgressions of the norms of International Humanitarian Law; 2) The TRC has established that the most serious human rights violations by military agents were: extrajudicial executions, forced disappearance of persons, torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. The TRC particularly condemns the extensive practice of sexual violence against women; 3) In the TRC's view, although the military intervention hit the organization and the operational capacity of the PCP-SL hard, it also left in its wake massive human rights violations and turned the two-year period from 1983-1984 into the most lethal of the conflict, mostly in Ayacucho. (TRC General Conclusions, Section III, par 55, 57 and 59)

In all, the “police and army units are believed responsible for more than 6,000 ‘disappearances’, for notorious massacres of civilians, and for the systematic torture of thousands picked up as guerilla suspects” (Brett, par7). The atrocities inflicted by the military were as violent and devastating to their victims as the acts committed by the terrorist organizations. The Shining Path, MRTA and military all created an environment of fear, demoralization and death for the indigenous peoples of Peru.

In the middle of these two decades of violence in 1990, a new president, Alberto Fujimori, took office. Fujimori's presidency did little to diminish the level of violence in Peru. Fujimori and the military under his command were also found to be responsible for violence committed against innocent civilians that

included the use of “death squads” and anonymous tribunals where hooded judges determined if those accused of belonging to terrorist organizations were innocent or guilty. Fujimori played on the fear of those who had experienced and witnessed the violence of terrorist organizations, in addition to a general mistrust of the government and congress by the poor and uneducated in Peru. Ironically, the very institutions that the Shining Path were attempting to combat, albeit through violence, were some of the same institutions that Fujimori was attacking (also through acts of violence and tyranny). In 1992, Fujimori took control of congress via a coup and rewrote the constitution according to his own prescriptions. According to his interpretation of this new constitution, Fujimori counted the start of his presidency at the end of his first term instead of the beginning, permitting him to serve as president for a third term. In 1992 he regained power through a coup. In addition, Fujimori’s government was known to be corrupt. When videotapes of his head of security services, Vladimiro Montesinos, taking bribes were aired on public television, Fujimori fled for Japan (where he also held citizenship) and faxed his resignation as President. It was then, in November, 2000, that the possibility opened up to examine and clarify the events that had taken place in the country for the previous twenty years.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> In 2005 Fujimori left Japan for Chile where he planned to enter Peru. However he was immediately arrested and eventually extradited to Peru for trial. Since then he has been accused and convicted of various abuses of power and human rights abuses and is currently in prison. His daughter, Keiko Fujimori, is favored as the 2011 Presidential Candidate. The complexities of Fujimori’s reputation in Peru can be demonstrated by his daughter’s and his own continued popularity in Peru. Though he has been found guilty of corruption and human rights violations, his tough stance against terrorism and other of his policies make him popular even in areas most impacted by the violence of the Dirty War.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was established by transitional President Valentin Paniagua. The Commission's purpose, according to decree No. 065-2001-PCM was to "contribute to the clarification of crimes and human rights violations by the respective organs of justice by seeking to establish the whereabouts and situation of the victims and by identifying as far as possible those responsible" (Brett Paragraph 19). The TRC also sought out to help the victims cope with their loss and to nationally recognize their grief; this is what they considered to be the process of reconciliation. Participants of the Commission note that, "Reconciliation is a process which implies a knowledge of what happened, exercising justice and building a society where citizens enjoy all their rights to become a democratic society" (Press Release 221). There were twelve elements of the TRC's work to assist them in their efforts to determine the truth of these violent acts, and to help heal the victims. These elements included the exhumation of bodies, the documentation of regional histories, proposals for reparations, a photo project, and public testimonies. It is this final element, the public testimonies, that most utilized performance and an understanding of the performative aspect of public events.

Truth and Reconciliation Commissions have taken place in many countries located in multiple continents including Argentina, Canada, Guatemala, Morocco, South Africa, South Korea and the United States. These commissions have been established to investigate war, violence between communities, violations of human rights, the mistreatment of indigenous populations and other topics. The emergence of TRCs in the United States, where justice is culturally

placed in the courtroom, is a relatively new phenomenon. Thus far, the most famous commission took place in South Africa in the mid 1990's to address the human rights abuses which took place during apartheid. This commission, led by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, has by far the most literature examining its work (to look up Truth and Reconciliation Commissions in a library one would think that this is the only TRC that has taken place) and is considered by many to be "the model" for TRCs to follow. While it is important to examine their function for providing individuals with the opportunity to seek justice, these commissions are an undeniable instrument of the state and must be viewed as such.

It is also important to examine the theatrical nature of trials and the work of TRCs. The application of laws and public trials are inherently performed and performative. Because they are inherently performances, "[b]y applying principles of dramatic theory and analysis to trials, we can illuminate the elements of theatre in trials: Stories are explored dramatically on a particular set, enacted by 'performers' who play specific roles, wear costumes, and have specific blocking" (Winner 151). One need only look at the popularity of courtroom dramas both fictionalized and "real" (*Law and Order*, *The Practice*, the television network Courtroom TV) to understand that, like any theatrical event, there is an audience to these events. Trials now have witnesses both within the courtroom and outside of the courtroom via those reading newspaper accounts, watching news reports and/or watching the trial itself on television. Trials also form narratives around traumatic events which like other narrative-forming agencies (such as the media), can uphold and confirm preexisting racial and class-based prejudices (Winner

154). Trials such as that of OJ Simpson, accused of murdering his ex-wife and her friend, quickly become racialized so that discourse around the crime focuses as much on societal views about race as it does on the crime itself.

But trials are also performative, in the sense that they bring about or “furnish forth” some crucial societal change or reaffirmation (Schechner) . The public nature of trials demonstrates not only an attempt to create a sense that justice is “transparent” and accessible to the public (in other words, that those involved in the judicial process have nothing to hide from the public) but also demonstrates the function justice serves, maintaining and reaffirming national standards of morals and behavior via the law. As Winner notes, “Even in extreme circumstances, when the outcome of a trial cannot actually have a real effect, its ceremony can provide a way for the public to participate in and to think about large ethical issues and even to practice empathy. . .” (154).

Within TRCs, the most public aspect of the Commissions’ work is the public testimonies arranged by the commission. The Peruvian TRC faced a number of challenges in their efforts to collect the public testimonies. In order to document the atrocities which had taken place during those twenty years, the TRC had to rely on accounts of those who witnessed and survived the events themselves. This was not easily accomplished for a number of reasons. The majority of victims during this time period were from the rural areas where most people were not formally educated and had been treated as second-class citizens for the entirety of their lives. Members of the Commission included prestigious lawyers, philosophers, priests, military supervisors, and political researchers from

Peru.<sup>18</sup> Communication would potentially be strained between the members of the TRC comprised of highly educated members of Peruvian society, none of them Quechua-speaking,<sup>19</sup> and the indigenous population. Not only would these differences be challenging from a linguistic perspective but it was also difficult to gain the trust of the testifiers who were understandably leery of the commissioners, extensions of the state who, regardless of their declared intentions, held positions of power and represented the culturally elite of Peru. Some critics saw the Commission as being a convoy of the privileged Liman, white society – there to make a spectacle of the indigenous society. It was important to the Commission that they do their best to show great respect for this group of people who had endured the violence of war for decades and other forms of physical and social violence for hundreds of years before that. However, as I will discuss later in the chapter, despite their declared intentions some of their actions were in fact problematic.

Others worried that bringing up painful events of the past would be an act similar to rubbing salt in a wound, possibly only re-victimizing those who had already been traumatized. Dr. Dori Laub, a leading expert in trauma testimony writes, “The act of telling might itself become severely traumatizing, if the price of speaking is *re-living*; not relief, but further retraumatization” (67). It was the responsibility and challenge of the TRC to convince those in the rural villages of

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<sup>18</sup> Members of the TRC are : Dr. Salomon Lerner Febres, Dr. Beatriz Alva Hart, Dr. Rolando Ames Cobian, Monsignor Jose Antunez de Mayolo, Air Force Lieutenant General Luis Arias Grazziani, Dr. Enrique Bernal Ballesteros, Dr. Carlos Ivan Degregori Caso, Father Caston Caratea York, Minister Humberto Lay Sun, Ms. Sofia Macher Batanero, Engineer Alberto Morote Sanchez and Engineer Carlos Tapia Garcia

<sup>19</sup> Quechua is the indigenous language most widely used in Peru. Until the end of the Peruvian Dirty War, Quechua was not an official language of Peru.



Peru that the Commission's arrival in their communities was not in fact another cultural dynamic in which the privileged class of Peru were taking advantage of the culturally Othered indigenous population, gaining information for their own political purposes. The commissioners would have to prove that speaking about the past served a purpose to the victims' healing process, to Peruvian society as a whole and that the testifiers would not merely be re-violated by the process of giving testimony.

In order to address this issue those, mostly women<sup>20</sup>, who were chosen to testify<sup>21</sup> had to have what the Commission considered to be a "sustained support system" including psychologists, family members, the Church, and friends (González). The TRC didn't allow anyone to testify who did not have people to assist them in the continued process of grieving and recovery from their trauma that would surely take place after giving testimony. The Commission recognized that the process of giving testimony, although helpful in the healing process, could also cause great pain and would require a network of support for the testifier. This is important because it has been suggested by critics of the commission that the TRC took advantage of the performance of this testimony and of the indigenous people themselves by asking for their testimony and then offering them no assistance, but in fact the TRC specifically "[d]id not want the isolated poor widow with no one to support her to [publicly] testify" (González).

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<sup>20</sup> The testifiers included mostly women for a number of reasons. The majority of those disappeared during the Dirty War were men and therefore, many of those who were "left behind" to testify on their behalf were women.

<sup>21</sup> The TRC chose people to testify who could represent the full range of the crimes that took place during those twenty years of war and terror, and would represent the full cultural range of victims.

Although the TRC did not have the financial means to provide psychological assistance to the testifiers, they made sure that such support already existed before they asked anyone to testify.

The public testimonies were also questioned by opponents of the TRC because they did not result in any jurisdictional consequences. The emphasis on investigating the “truth” through these testimonies is problematized by the fact that establishing the truth of an event through testimony is nearly impossible. Research suggests that testimony given by victims of trauma is rarely completely accurate, and that often human trauma cannot be retold (Alpert). Luis Millones, one of the most well-known anthropologists in Peru, stated that it would be “almost impossible for the TRC to create an accurate history because the memory is so broken” (Millones). A common danger of this is that when part of the testimony is identified as false, the entire testimony may be deemed invaluable and false. Members of the Commission were aware that the testimonies’ purpose was not in fact to establish the truth of these events. Eduardo González, a former member of the Commission, explained to me in a personal interview that those who testified were connected to a case in which the TRC already had physical evidence about the disappearance of their loved one. According to González, the testimony was therefore not about attaining knowledge, it was about acknowledging. Because the majority of the victims’ families had been dismissed by the Peruvian government and much of the Peruvian population for so many years, the very opportunity for them to come forward and speak was a potentially empowering moment for them.

The curator of the TRC-sponsored photo exhibit Yuyanapaq, an exhibit that exemplified in graphic detail of the violence of the war, stated that the “act of testifying had a therapeutic effect – the importance was in the testimonial itself.” Psychological research suggests that in fact testimony can serve as a healing act. Dr. Laub writes, “Knowledge in the testimony is, in other words, not simply a factual given that is reproduced and replicated by the testifier, but a genuine advent, an event in its own right” (62). The testimony given was not about establishing facts, but about the performance or act of giving testimony in and of itself. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission had a strong sense of this and openly recognized the performed elements of their work.

The performance of politics in Peru was utilized by Fujimori in a way that had never been seen in Peru before. Under the rule of Fujimori, traditional politics were erased and replaced with the rise of “media politics” (Degregori). Fujimori was known for entering into a community and adopting/performing the local markers of belonging to that community including various dialects of Spanish and clothing. In one day, Fujimori would visit a town in the Andes and wear the traditional clothing of that area, then join a group of miners and dress up like the miners, including wearing a mining hat. Fujimori, who was Japanese, did not himself look like most other Peruvians. His nickname was “El Chino.” However his ability to “perform” the many different identities of being Peruvian, his acting abilities, is considered to be a large contributing factor to his popularity. When Guzmán, the leader of the Shining Path, was captured, Fujimori put him in a black and white striped prison outfit and put him in a cage that was placed in public for

the media to broadcast to all. As Fujimori describes in the documentary *The Fall of Fujimori*, these types of uniforms are not even in use in Peru, but it was an image Fujimori associated with the movies and he wanted to make this moment as dramatic as possible. It was important that the TRC recognize the role of media and performance in Peruvian culture, and that they use performance as effectively if not more effectively than those who had perpetrated the crimes that they were now trying to investigate. Therefore, the process of retrieving the testimony included many performative steps.

The night before people were to testify, a vigil would be organized by the people of that individual town. This moment allowed a public showing of grief and remembrance. Even though so much time had passed from the time of their loss, in some cases up to twenty years from the time their loved one was disappeared, it was imperative that they be allowed to perform this act of remembrance. People carried pictures of their loved ones, candles and flowers. They also carried large cutouts of the human form, making present (albeit in a surrogate form) those bodies which had been disappeared during the war. Like the memorial walk of Stonewalk, these processions served both as an act of remembrance and an act of empowerment for those performing the ceremony. For many, this was the first time they were able to acknowledge their loss at a public level. These candlelit memorials also mirrored the vigils created in other South American countries such as the actions of groups including the Madres del Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires who carried photos of their disappeared children, at a time when the disappearances were still taking place, were denied by the

military and put the mothers in danger. This puts these public performances in a continuum of such performances, providing a prescription for making such vigils and also connecting the violence that had taken place in Peru with the violence that had taken place in Argentina and other countries. These vigils also served an important function setting the stage for the upcoming public testimonies.

When the time came for the villagers to give their testimony, this too was considered a performative event. As Eduardo González explained to me, the performance of the testimony was highly orchestrated. The seating arrangement during the testimony was meant to be “staged” in the most effective manner possible. The members of the Commission watched many videos of previous TRCs including tapes of testimony given in South Africa and Nigeria. The Peruvian TRC felt that the format/staging of these commission’s testimonies were “overly legalistic” (González). They did not want to create something that looked like a courtroom which could possibly intimidate or even re-traumatize the testifiers.

The TRC sought to create the “[d]rama and ceremony of a court without degrading it to the level of a panel” (González). The Peruvian TRC distinguished themselves from their predecessors in South Africa and Nigeria by placing the testifiers in the same space as the members of the commissioners. They created a u-shaped table at which the members of the Commission and the testifiers would both sit. Both the commissioners and the testifiers faced the audience. In both the South African and Nigerian Commissions, the testifiers had their backs to the audience and had to face the panel of commissioners who looked down on them

from a raised stage. According to González, the Peruvian commissioners felt that this format performed power on the part of the Commission and could be traumatic to the testifiers. They chose their arrangement with the goal of empowering the victims through staging. This is perhaps the clearest example of the connection between performance studies and public events such as trials and public testimonies. The TRC understood that the placement of people within a space not only from a functional perspective, but also as a performance of power and importance. Just as though they were staging a play, the commissioners paid special attention to every detail of who was located where while the testimonies were given and even consulted Yuyachkani's director, Miguel Rubio, to discuss the setting of these testimonies.

When the person was called to testify they would walk towards the table and the commissioners would stand up. This format was the mirror opposite of the performance of a trial where everyone stands when the judge, in this case the commissioners, enter. They wanted the commissioners not to be portrayed as judges, but rather as witnesses to the testimony, equal in visual status to the testifiers. When the testimony was delivered, no one in the audience or the commissioners was allowed to say a word. This also distinguishes the Peruvian TRC from other Commissions such as the South African TRC, where commissioners were allowed to question the victims and legal representatives of the perpetrators were allowed to cross-examine them. In Peru, if the victim broke down emotionally while testifying, they were not asked to contain themselves, nor were they verbally prompted or coached. González explains that the performance

of that testimony should be left untouched. “The speech is broken [he said], because the personality is broken” (González). The words that the testifier spoke and the way that they spoke remained untouched by the Commission because they were considered a direct representation of the testifiers’ psychological state of being.

The relationship between the Commission and the testifiers, in addition to the audience at the testimony, was vitally important. Laub writes, “Testimonies are not monologues; they cannot take place in solitude. The witnesses are talking to *somebody*: to somebody they have been waiting for a long time” (71). How the *somebody* was performed and presented to the victims of the violence was crucial because the performance of the Commission in this process could either reinforce or dismantle the cultural divides which had contributed to the violence in Peru. Their careful consideration of the performance of the testimony, at least in its intent, attempted to mend these divides.

During both the vigils created the night before the testimony and in the moment of giving testimony itself a process of mourning occurred at the communal and even the national level in Peru. González and members of Yuyachkani described the testimonies to me as nothing short of “A civic, albeit non-religious mass.” The public testimonies were a transformative moment not only for the victims of the violence, but for the audience of the testimony as well. “By extension, the listener to trauma comes to be a participant and a co-owner of the traumatic event: through his very listening, he comes to partially experience trauma in himself” (Laub 57). By listening to this testimony, the audience

including the members of the Commission and all those who watched the testimony broadcast on television became witnesses to the trauma which had taken place in the rural hills. Pushing the boundaries of the relationship between audience and performer, the members of the audience became implicated in these events; they were a new generation of witnesses to the traumatic events. In this process, even those who had not lost anyone through the violence were implicated by the testimony and drawn into the process of grieving. This is significant in regards to the particular construction of national trauma in Peru.

The larger work of the Commission and specifically these public testimonies brought awareness to those in Peru that had previously been unaware (either through an honest lack of information, or through voluntary blindness) of the violence taking place in the rural communities of the Andes. The televising of these testimonies implied that those who had not been directly affected by the violence *should* care about what had taken place in *their* country. Populations which had previously been placed “outside” of the national definition of Peruvian identity were now placed front and center on a larger “national stage.” While before these public testimonies took place those who did not directly experience the violence were indifferent to it, since the population that composed the majority of the war’s victims the violence most impacted was not in the social boundaries and construction of national belonging, the work of the Commission established these events as being relevant to *all* Peruvians.

These public testimonies help in the rebuilding process of creating a new nation that is, at least in theory, separated from the nation that could foster and



allow that level of violence to take place. For the Peruvian Commission, allowing the voice of previously silenced communities to enter the homes of the culturally elite of Peru built a new construction and definition of nation. However this nation-building process does have problematic elements. In an analysis of the South African testimonies, Buur writes,

The ritualized public representations emerging from the work of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), and in particular from the public hearings and the final report, are powerful performances of truth-telling by the 'new' nation-state that clearly distinguish it from the former violent and evil apartheid state, which was characterized by 'mendacity.' However, this celebrated, 'on-stage' public truth-telling goes together with the invisible, 'backstage' dimensions of bureaucratic truth production. (66)

In other words, the work of the Commission does not exist within a vacuum.

Within the process of what Burr calls "bureaucratic truth production" are processes of selection, foregrounding and silencing certain narratives. Despite their stated efforts, the work of the Commission creates a new narrative about the period of violence they are investigating, about the peoples they are investigating and about the nation they envision for the future. Speaking specifically about the work of the Commission in Peru, Cynthia Milton notes,

The inclusion of alternative or unofficial means of recounting the past favors the formation of public history as constructed from below, that is, by nonstate actors. While the CVR findings contested the official heroic narrative of the Fujimori government, still other narratives in the form of individual and collective memories and artifacts abound. (8)

The creation of a "new" nation-state is inevitably a political act. Therefore, in the process of the Commission's work, experiences, views and narratives that do not fit into the new political agenda are at risk of being silenced. Furthermore, those

who hold responsibility for acts of violence during the war but were being protected by the new government would also be protected from investigation by the TRC. For example, while members of the Peruvian military were found responsible for some of the violence that took place, “. . .no specific thematic or public assembly was held with them; the military also did not officially acknowledge or respond to the CVR findings” (Milton 10).

Contemplating some of the ethical conundrums of theatre and performance representing traumatic events illuminates another potentially problematic aspect of the TRC. While the televised public testimonies, according to people I have spoken with, allowed for audiences otherwise removed from the violence to become emotionally invested in what happened during the years of violence, it is also possible that the very fact the testimonies were televised allowed them to be viewed as fictionalized events. Like Peruvian telenovelas, people’s stories of murder, rape, disappearance and torture were broadcast for all to witness. Just as I question the slippery slope into the pornographization of violence on stage, it is possible that some who tuned in to view the testimonies on television were entertained in some ways to hear about these acts of violence, horrific as they were. Also, the image of the indigenous people testifying to acts of violence invoked a pre-existing image of the indigenous populations as victim. Just as the black bodies on television during Hurricane Katrina were plugged into an already familiar image which in some ways made it easier for white audiences in particular to be apathetic to what they saw on television, a similar phenomenon might have occurred for some in Peru who could ignore what they saw on

television because it was as if it was simply a drama taking place, a drama they were already familiar with; the indigenous populations were merely playing their role, without real, material consequences or effects from the violence they had endured.

Examining TRCs in the perspective of this dissertation's larger interest in nation, the question emerges, who is the true beneficiary of these Commissions? Though the Peruvian TRC was very vocal in its attempts to help the victims of the war, at the same time, the public testimonies did not have any jurisdictional ramifications. Though I earlier quoted the psychological benefits of giving testimony, at the same time, it must be noted that these are very distinct western psychological theories utilized on populations with their own understandings of justice, healing and trauma. It would take a much larger study to analyze the impact of the TRC's work on those who had given testimony and I do not want to make any declarative statements on the value, or lack thereof, for those who did give testimonies. It is important however to think about the work of the Commission as participating in a process wherein the concept of a "cohesive nation" needs to be (re)established (though this cohesive nation may not have existed in the first place). I'm asking here how commissions "perform" in a functionary and metaphorical way, within larger performances of nation and nationhood, and specifically create a sense that healing has taken place and wounds are now healed, even if this has not in fact occurred.<sup>22</sup> While many

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<sup>22</sup> This may not be a sense that the Commission itself intends to portray, but it could be perceived that way once it is displayed on the "national stage" and open for interpretation.

declare “Nunca Más” (Never Again) in regards to the violence that took place, that is a declaration easier said than implemented.

### **Yuyachkani**

A vitally important participant during the public testimonies was Grupo Cultural Yuyachkani. This theater collective was formed in 1971, (nine years before the Dirty War) and since then has established itself as the premiere theater company of Peru by pushing the boundaries of aesthetics within performance and cultural representation. Their performances address the cultural divides which caused such devastating violence within Peru; during the war they represented the indigenous populations and the violence that was taking place in their communities when it was still unsafe and culturally taboo to do so.

In her article about the relationship between Yuyachkani and the Commission, Francine A’Ness asks, “What could theatre do to compete with the spectacle of war that was saturating the media and spilling onto the social stage of the streets?” (399). The spectacle she refers to is the televised testimonies taking place during the Commission’s investigations. The work of Yuyachkani is full of spectacle, using large props, color and music. Their performances, in an agit-prop style, are designed so that they can grab people’s attentions on the streets, in large public squares and spaces. Their performances also involve stilts, masks, and other “larger than life” objects. They use Peruvian symbols such as the national flag, and the national colors of red and white, to create large images in public spaces. All members in the group play multiple instruments and sing; skills that also help grab people’s attention in large public spaces. Both their continued

focus on social issues and the visual aspects of their performance, made them an appropriate choice to accompany the TRC.

In one of Yuyachkani's more famous productions, *Antigona* (based on Sophocles's *Antigone*), the group addresses many of the issues specific to the Peruvian Dirty War. The play (both the Sophocles version and Yuyachkani's) centers on Antigona who cannot grieve for her lost brother because Creon has forbidden her or anyone else from doing so. He declares that it is time for the city to rejoice and to no longer feel the anguish of war and terror. The people of Thebes are encouraged to go about their daily activities. In order to fulfill his newly found power, Creon must create a calm society that will not focus on the death of Polynieces and his brother. His declaration that Polynieces shall not be buried defines who is to be considered human and who is not. Creon states in the play that only those who are honorable shall be buried and those who are the "enemy to the State" will not be afforded such rights.

Yuyachkani created the piece in the year 2000, at the end of Fujimori's presidency. The production's creation was also inspired by Teresa Ralli's (the creator and lone actress in the piece) proximity to the Japanese Embassy that had been the site of a nearly four month standoff involving hostages and the terrorist organization the MRTA. The standoff ended when Fujimori executed a plan to have the embassy overtaken, the hostages extracted, and the MRTA members killed. The play was an appropriate choice because of its clear parallels to the cultural and political situation at the time in Peru. The choice to have the character played by one actress stemmed from the fact that, "Antigone must have

been extremely alone in her task and she [Ralli] thought of how alone the women were who were searching for their loved ones” (Ralli, Yale University). These women, like Antigona, were not able to bury the bodies of their loved ones, because in many cases there was no body to be buried.<sup>23</sup>

In order to create this piece, Teresa invited family members of the disappeared to come and speak with her one at a time. First, Teresa would sit on the stage and tell them the story of Antigone. She would say, “This is something that took place thousands of years ago,” and then proceed to tell them the tale. Afterward, she would switch places with the woman. The woman, sitting on the stage, would then tell Teresa *her* story. Each story was different in its own way but Teresa notes, “After a while you began to see common elements. The common denominator was courage – and years of struggle” (Ralli in Lima). For all these years the women, like Antigona, did not give up their determination to be able to give their loved one a proper burial. Liz Rojas Valdez is an example of this determination. A young Peruvian woman whose mother was disappeared, Rojas searched for years to find out what happened to her mother and to find her mother’s body, assuming she was dead. She describes her experience as follows, “It’s been like a shadow over my life. . . I need to see my mother’s bones so that I can bury her. Everyone has somewhere to go to say farewell to the dead” (Qtd in Brett 2). This statement exemplifies the anguish of so many Peruvian women and demonstrates the clear parallels between Antigona’s struggles and their own.

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<sup>23</sup> Thousands of victims were buried in unmarked graves and were not identified until years after their murders.

At the end of the play, Ismene, Antigona's sister, is revealed to be the narrator of the play. She confesses that Antigona asked her to help in her endeavors but she refused, frightened by the King and his demands of proper mourning. According to Teresa, her silence mirrors the silence that existed in Peru when the murders were taking place, in particular the silence of the media who were aware of what was going on but were either too frightened or too apathetic to report it. Ismene is finally able to do what her sister was unable to do and what she was initially too frightened to do and in honor of her sister and brother, she performs the burial ritual forbidden by her uncle. In this way Ismene is also like Yuyachkani who performed acts of remembrance for those (mostly indigenous) people who, when the violence was taking place, were still relatively unknown to the culturally elite of Peru. Creon, the King of Thebes, is a symbol of the State, and in Yuyachkani's production, he clearly represents the corrupt Peruvian government. His control over Antigona's grief is a thinly masked metaphor of the governmental and cultural control over the people of Peru at the time.

Yuyachkani's connection to the rural community was and continues to be strong. Their connection to the victims of the violence and their families was already deep because of their work on productions like *Antigona* and their involvement speaking to the victims. As a result, Sofia Macher, one of the founding members of the TRC, invited Yuyachkani to perform as part of the testimony process. The members of the Commission felt that Yuyachkani's presence in the community could help gain the trust of indigenous population of

Peru, “. . .It was thought that the semiotically rich and evocative power of theatre, when combined with the ritual nature of the event, might help mark the postwar transition, dignify its victims, honor the dead and disappeared, and thus prompt people to come forward and speak publicly to the Commission without fear” (A’Ness 396).

When the vigils were over in the town the night before the public testimonies, Augusto Casafranca and Anna Correa performed *Adios Ayacucho*. The play starts with a woman who plays a flute to invoke the spirit of her loved one who has been “disappeared.” She plays beside a platform where the clothing and shoes of her husband are laid out with candles and flowers. These clothes, according to Andean custom, lie in wake for eight days after the death of a loved one (Yale Rep Theater Program). For many this became the replacement ritual of burial because in many cases there were no bodies to be buried. The reference to Andean grieving customs indicated to the audience that Yuyachkani understood there were sensitive issues surrounding the circumstances of their loved one’s deaths – that the customs now being celebrated were previously markers of an identity that left them vulnerable to acts of violence. By acknowledging these customs, Yuyachkani made a strong and direct statement about the importance of acknowledging cultural differences in Peru, not as a deficiency for the country but rather as a strength. This also shows the parallels between Yuyachkani’s work and the commissioners who also made great attempts to incorporate specific Andean customs into the public testimonies.



As the instrument is played, a black garbage bag towards the back of the stage begins to move. This garbage bag is not unlike the make-shift body bags that were used to discard the victims of the violence in Peru. A Q'olla, a Peruvian clown character, appears and while he tries to steal the shoes of the disappeared Alfonso Canepa, he is possessed by the man's spirit. When he sees his clothing laid out, the spirit realizes he is dead and with this realization is filled with great sadness; his words are filled with grief. In this play the dead are embodied and have a living presence. With the use of the Q'olla's body, Canepa journeys to collect the bones of his dismembered body. He declares, "I want my bones, I want my literal, complete body, even if it is entirely dead." The search for his body, like Antigona's journey to bury her brother, reflects the endeavors of those who had been left behind in Peru to search for the bodies of their loved ones. Canepa is a living spirit, who can fully feel the loss of his own life and grieve for it.

Many scholars when writing about this piece describe it as a one-man show with musical accompaniment. However, I argue that the presence of the bereaved at the beginning of the play is significant and should be regarded as an additional character in the play. If it were not for the woman's invocation of the man's spirit through her mournful music, and the power of her memory, the bag would remain anonymous and unmoving; her grief brings the dead back to life. The performance of this piece, in conjunction with the TRC's efforts, sent a strong message to the testifiers. While the victims who died as a result of the violence were not actually able to physically testify before the Commission, those

who were mourning their loss could invoke their spirit and give them voice, just as the woman in *Adios Ayacucho* did. The performance of this piece by Yuyachkani showed the people being asked to testify that their loss was not something they needed to be ashamed of and that in fact it could be a source of their own power and could be a source of power for those that were “disappeared.”

Another piece performed by Yuyachkani during the public testimonies was *Rosa Cuchillo*. This piece is based on a Peruvian novel by Oscar Colchado Lucio, and also on the real life of Mama Angelica whose son was disappeared during the war. In the play the character of Rosa dies looking for her son. In her journey through the afterlife she continues to search for him until she finds his spirit. She returns to “our world” to tell us of this journey and “signifies the harmony of life and death through ritual and purification, and through that, a way to help people overcome fear, and to begin to heal from *forgetfulness*” (Yale Rep Theater Program). *Rosa Cuchillo*, like *Antigona*, is a solo piece performed by Ana Correa. It is a play with very little words. Briefly, Rosa tells the audience of her son’s disappearance and the journey she takes to find his body until she realizes at last that she herself has died in her search. After the dialogue ends, Ana moves into a physical dialogue in which through movement and vocal interpretations she communicates her experience. This mirrors the experience of many women who perhaps because of emotional or linguistic barriers could not vocally express the loss they had experienced. Yuyachkani believes that history is expressed both in words and through the corporeal memory of those who have

been traumatized, what Diana Taylor refers to in *Archive and the Repertoire* as the repertoire. Yuyachkani's theatrical aesthetic explores the power of language but also of imagery and movement. *Rosa Cuchillo* is a strong example of this aesthetic.

At a performance of *Rosa Cuchillo* at Yale University, an audience member asked at an after-performance Q & A, "Why are so many of your plays about the dead?" Teresa Ralli replied that in fact they are not showing these victims as dead but are rather showing the value of their life. She said, "You have to see the victims as nothing less than fully alive and to interrupt what makes the spectacle of this death and violence normal" (Ralli, Yale University). The spectacle of such a level of violence is normalized at least in part because the victims are without an identity and are culturally othered before the traumatic events occur. To give them a strong identity in their performances is to raise them from a level of Other to what is considered an important and grievable life. Teresa went on to say that theater can be a partner in mourning when it recognizes the dead as a living presence (Ralli, Yale University).

Not only did Yuyachkani perform in conjunction with the public testimonies but they were also present at the testimonies. When I asked Ana Correa what it was like to listen to that testimony, she said it was "[m]ore than anyone can imagine" (Correa, Ana). This is a sentiment that has been echoed by many of those who listened to the testimony during those days. Ana says she feels that they had been working all of those years to be there. Traveling the world and performing in many prestigious venues, doing their personal work,

speaking with the people they had, listening to themselves and each other, had prepared them to be in that moment listening to the people of their country speak of the atrocities they endured.

Perhaps because of the ritualistic nature of their performances (almost all of their pieces involve both Catholic and indigenous ceremonies) or for more subtle reasons, people also approached the actors who were with the TRC and began to tell them their own stories. One actor had a woman describe her experience finding the corpse of her child when she was working in a mine. Some of these people told the Yuyachkani members that they would not tell their stories to the TRC but felt comfortable speaking with them. Instances such as these clearly blurred the boundaries between the members of Yuyachkani and the Commission. For those that believe artists have no place participating in such judicial/social work, the relationship of these Yuyachkani members to these people whom had experienced the traumatic events demonstrates the ability of performers to do more than “simply entertain.”

Ana stated that when they returned to Lima they, the members of Yuyachkani, knew they needed to create a new theatrical language; the point could no longer be about fighting against the system. They wanted a better way of living but they realized that “no government or philosophy was going to give them that” (Correa). They had to create it with their work. After their experience working with the Commission, they began to work towards creating a “theater to heal. All these years the people have been afraid – they are sick in the mind and in the heart. The arts have to invent different techniques to connect with the

people” (Ana Correa). This goal is not unlike the stated goal of the Commission, to heal communities so that such violence might not occur again.

After the TRC turned in its final report, Yuyachkani began work on *Sin Titulo* (Without Title) - a direct dialogue with the work of the TRC and with the role they had as performers after the TRC’s work was completed. The play is expansive both in theme and staging; it begins with the war between Peru and Chile, known as the War of the Pacific, which took place in the late 1800’s. We then move through time and the actions of the play address the findings of the TRC. The play examines themes including the history of violence in the nation, the act of testifying to one’s experiences with violence, the role of testimony in the judicial system, the role of education in violence, political corruption, and other themes. The play not only reflects the history of Peru but also the history of the work Yuyachkani had done since their inception.

Before the performance begins the audience waits in the courtyard of the Casa Yuyachkani, the space where the group does many of their performances, has their office, conducts workshops and rehearses. At the performances that I attended in the summers of 2004 and 2005, audience members were talkative while they were waiting in the courtyard. Some friends greeted each other, some people introduced themselves to people they hadn’t met, some people talked about Peru, Yuyachkani and other issues related to the play while others talked about things that seemingly had nothing to do with what we were about to watch.

I return to the quote from the Sala’s courtyard that begins this chapter, “The memory needs anchors: Places and dates, commemorative monuments,

rituals. Sensoral stimulations, a smell, a noise, an image – can trigger memories and emotions.” This uncredited quote is significant to the experience we are about to have as an audience. The audience is at first moved through a hallway filled with photos, books and other historical relics that reflect the history of the country between the war with Chile and the Dirty War. When I saw the play for the first time, though I did not yet know of the historical relevance of what I was looking at, it was clear that the archive and all of its implications as described by authors such as Diana Taylor, was a major “character” in the play. This became clearer when we entered into the main theater space and into what felt like a museum. There were photos on the walls, quotes, dates and statistics written in chalk on the wall and costumes hanging like historical relics in a museum. On large blocks functioning like pedestals, the members of Yuyachkani stood still as statues. Then, with a collective breath, they began to move and the “museum” came to life.

The play includes short monologues in which various characters call out to a journalist/author and then a character representing the TRC (both characters played by Augusto Casafranca) and they describe their experiences with the war against Chile. These monologues are descriptions of a bloody, violent war – descriptions that could easily be confused with the testimonies that had recently been delivered to the TRC. Like other pieces by the group, such as *Rosa Cuchillo*, *Sin Titulo* has very little dialogue and includes long intervals in which the actors pantomime actions, perform ritual ceremonies, play instruments, dance, point to objects in the set and “speak” to the audience via physical monologues.

Though, as I will describe later on, the play in many ways emphasizes the importance of the word, it simultaneously emphasizes the importance of corporeal memory and the inability to express everything, particularly in regards to trauma, through words.

Like many performances created by the group, this play is filled with spectacle. The passages that do not use words are particularly filled with images and over-exaggerated actions creating monologues and dialogues without using words. An example of this is when a number of actors walk around on stilts wearing masks of famous political characters from the period of 1980-2000 such as President Fujimori. While they are marching through the theater space, they interact with each other in ways that show the corrupt relationships between these political figures. While this is happening there is video playing on a television that is mounted high on one of the walls of the Sala. These video clips are well-known images of Shining Path leader Guzmán after his capture and of Fujimori's cabinet members accepting bribes. The audience looks between the videos and the masked characters walking around the space. These masked characters throw a ball decorated as the globe to each other, and take fake dollar bills, throwing them around so quickly that a flurry of money, like snow, is created.

Another example of spectacle is when actress Teresa Ralli, dressed as a student imitating her school teacher, violently marches around a desk and points to a blackboard where she has written out a history lesson. Her gestures and motions become more animated and violent as she points to the board in a repetitive way. The real teacher, played by Ana Correa then comes in.

Eventually Correa puts on a green mask and pulls her long black hair down. The school teacher has transformed into some kind of grotesque character. She begins to beat on a drum and march. There is no spoken text during this portion of the play but there is much being said about the role education and brainwashing played during the recruitment of young students by Guzmán (who was a professor when he began his movement) to join the Shining Path. The actors also mimic the spectacle of political marches utilized by both the Peruvian government and members of the Shining Path. The use of spectacle in the group's pieces not only reflects the practical necessities of a theatrical style that could grab people's attention when the group did unannounced performances in public spaces, but also satirizes and points to the spectacular nature of the events, and key players in those events, that had taken place both during the Dirty War and before that. Like Charlie Chaplan's parody of Adolf Hitler in his film *The Great Dictator*, these performances make fun of and show the ridiculous and yet powerful nature of the performances of politicians, the military, and leaders of guerilla organizations.

The placement of the audience during the show is also significant. Many of the actions of the show take place on platforms that are moved throughout the space. The audience stands around the platforms in circles. Depending on where you are standing, you will see various sides of the actor or in some cases you may not be able to see anything at all, finding your view obstructed by other audience members. In my case when this occurred I found myself looking at the writing on the walls. This is part of the power of the performance: as an audience member you have agency to decide where to look. Although at times the action of the play



is quite centered and you know where you are supposed to look, you are not forced by a seat and a proscenium stage to look only in one direction.

The stage platforms are on wheels and are pushed around throughout the performance. The audience is constantly moving throughout the performance as the platforms are moved around the space. If you did not move, you would unapologetically be run over by actors pushing a platform. In addition, actors who are not on these platforms are standing amongst the audience and move around as they are conducting their scenes. There is always a certain level of discomfort as an audience member, because you know that you can't relax in one position for too long before you will be forced to move somewhere else. If it could be said that audience members passively watched the public testimonies, via their television screens and from the comfort of their own homes, the experience of watching *Sin Titulo* is not passive at all. The audience is also, therefore, constantly confronted with the physical presence of those describing their experiences during the war.

The movement around the space also means that each audience member will have his or her own perception of the play according to where they are standing during each scene. What you see, how you see it, what you hear and how you hear it, depends entirely on what part of the theater you were in at the time. This is evidenced through my own experience seeing the play multiple times and from talking to other audience members who have a very different “narrative” of the play. It is important to note that the Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission had recently turned in their Final Report and the idea

of narrative was very volatile at the time of the play's creation. Issues of how history is written, who writes that history and who is included or omitted in/from that history were all contentious topics at the time. When an audience member notes that they have a different "narrative" of the play than another audience member, are they not also noting the larger fact that narrative is always subjective, and that one narrative alone cannot cover the complexity of an event? By moving the audience around in this way, Yuyachkani subtly but brilliantly makes this statement about the impossibilities and dangers of creating fixed narratives.

The physical relationship between the audience and the actors also means that there is no fourth-wall between an "us" and "them." Throughout the performance the actors and spectators are standing side by side. From the moment we enter the theater space and walk up to the "museum pieces" of the actors standing close in front of them, looking at them from all directions, to the moments when suddenly an actor is standing inches away from you enacting a scene, there is a very thin layer of distance between the actors, the scenes, and the audience members. This is also making a political statement; there is a very thin layer between the spectators of violence and those who are impacted by events such as the Dirty War. The performance asks, what is our "role" when history is being created? And how far is our distance from something when we are witnessing it? When you can feel the heat of an actor as they describe (in character) how their husband was murdered in the war it evokes a very particular response; it is difficult not to feel the pain of that character when the physical

body of that character/actor is so close to your own body. This is another way in which the play accomplishes something for audience members in Lima that they would not have experienced watching the testimonies take place on television – the embodied experience of witnessing testimony.

A dominant image in the play is that of a number of people giving “testimonies” to a man at a typewriter. This image represents the urgent need the victims have to tell their story. As Ana would explain to me, “The written word is ultimate, history has to be written.” And she reminded me for many this was the first time their story would ever be written. This image of the man at the typewriter, reflects that importance. This is also reflected in the final scene of *Sin Titulo* which ends with the image of written words and photos on the costumes of two women. The costumes are pointed at with flashlights and it is evident that these characters had been “written on” through the course of history and history-making. This represents not only the way such a horrible history had been written on the bodies of those it had affected but also, again, the importance of word and documentation in Peru. In fact the final act(ion) of the Commission was to turn in a written copy of the Final Report to the Peruvian government. While the final report was an important document, the fact that this was the final act of a Commission that had emphasized the verbal, embodied and performative elements of testimony seemed contradictory or, at least, anticlimactic.

Though reports and legal documentation are undeniably necessary, the power of what Taylor emphasizes as the archive in her study of the relationship between the archive and the repertoire, seemed to dominate the ultimate actions of

the Commission. Furthermore, the report was written in Spanish, despite the well-documented (within the report itself) fact that the majority of the victims were Quechua-speaking. This yet again puts into question the intended beneficiary of the Commission's work. The Final Report would only be accessible to those who, for the most part, had not experienced the war in close proximity. *Sin Titulo*, with its focus on the power of the word, both upholds and challenges the power of the written word and the process of writing history.

The play is about memory; it is about the memory of a country, the memories of those who testified to the Commission and about the audience members' memories. The image of the museum was particularly important after the TRC completed its work, as the Commission attempted to create a collective memory, a living museum of these devastating events. When the actors begin to move through the space, becoming living and breathing museum objects, a clear statement is made - history is living, it is not dead. The people who are documented in the photos of history and the written testimonies of those that survived the atrocities of 1980-2000, are not relics of history, they are living and breathing human beings who must be remembered if change is ever to occur in Peru. Even those who have passed onto what Ana calls "the other world" have memories that remain and are very much alive in the minds and hearts of those people left behind. The experiences the group had in hearing the testimony certainly fortified what they already knew and depicted in their work; memory is a physical entity that must be dealt with and that the dead have a living presence among the survivors. Audience members at some of the performances I attended

included members of the Commission and some of the culturally “elite” of Lima. For Commission members, the play offers an embodied enactment of some of the findings of their work and their report. For other Limeños the play offered a space to reflect on their “participation” (via non-participation) in the events that took place during the war. For both commissioners and non-commissioners, the play offers an alternative experience to the work of the Commission that, through its content and primarily through its form, challenges and supplements the work of the Commission.

As commissioners and other social theorists in Peru observed, many of the crimes that occurred between 1980 and 2000 were the result of the great divide between social groups in Peru. As long as these gaps remain, the potential exists for such an event to occur again. While the Truth and Reconciliation Commission set out to begin a process of reconciliation, the dialogue that must occur between individuals and themselves and with their community is a conversation that the TRC cannot dictate or mandate. As Ana described to me, “The reconciliation is within yourself, with your family and with the village.” In addition to their performances, Teresa Ralli and Ana Correa have begun workshops working with psychologists that work with women to allow them to process the psychological damage that they have endured via the loss of their loved ones, or a physical violation they have survived such as rape. These workshops comprise four sessions which last for approximately four hours each. They begin the sessions by asking the women to talk about an important, positive, moment in their life. Ana tells me they begin this way so that the women may

begin to feel better about themselves. As Ana stated to me, if they started by asking the women to describe painful memories they might become overwhelmed and in a sense would be violated all over again. As the women begin to trust the group, they then proceed to tell their stories, physically, and vocally. They make masks and are able to express themselves in ways which they probably have never been allowed to do before. These members of Yuyachkani are furthering their support of the grieving community and helping them with this process.

The presence of a theatrical group during the work of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission may seem superfluous. Though performance was also heavily utilized by the South African TRC, for many, particularly in the United States, the pursuit of justice and theatrical performance seem to be completely separate from each other. The work that Grupo Cultural Yuyachkani had created from their inception addressed the layers of history and identity that contribute to Peru's current events and construction as a nation. If national traumas illuminate the preexisting performance of nation and nationhood, Yuyachkani's work pointed to this performance before, during and after the national trauma of the Peruvian Dirty War. Pieces such as *Rosa Cuchillo*, *Adios Ayacucho* and *Antigona* directly addressed the violence taking place. Their performances in Lima confronted audience members that, at the time, may have still been unaware (intentionally or not) of the violence taking place in the rural regions of Peru. While the Truth and Reconciliation Commission offered testifiers the opportunity to testify to their experiences, the performances Yuyachkani performed during the testimonies spoke to the power of testimony.

*Sin Titulo*, which they created after their time with the Commission, examines both past events that contributed to the Dirty War and the complexities of documenting these events and dealing with a nation struggling to define itself after such an event.

## CONCLUSION

In her book *Iconic Events*, Patricia Leavy writes about the three part process that constitutes an event as iconic: “1) intense initial interpretive practices by the press, 2) directed political uses by special interest groups, and 3) the transformation of history into a commodity to be offered on the open market and/or as a form of popular entertainment” (25). In this dissertation I have attempted to demonstrate the distinct nature of national traumas within the category of collective trauma and to show how national traumas are constructed by producers of knowledge including the government and the media. These events are also, as Leavy notes, transformed into a “commodity” and “popular entertainment.” While the performances addressed in this dissertation may participate in this process, they also illuminate the performance of nation that is greatly disrupted and then redefined by these national traumas. I am interested in how performances that address national traumas participate in and resist the processes that construct national traumas as such.

Some of the primary questions driving this dissertation have been: What function does performance have after a national trauma? What makes performance unique in its portrayal of national traumas? Ultimately, these questions are too large to ever answer fully and certainly not in one document such as this dissertation. However, I believe that some answers to these questions have emerged that I hope to reiterate in this conclusion.

**Thoughts for Future Consideration: Trauma Traveling, Local to Global**



One of the common themes among the performances discussed in this dissertation is that many of them have traveled from the original site of trauma to cities and, in some cases, nations that were not so immediately impacted by those events. Even those performances that have not traveled so broadly have traveled in some ways. Stonewalk was primarily a traveling demonstration, beginning in Boston and ending in New York City. *Patriot Act* was performed both in New York and other East Coast cities as well as Vienna, Austria. *The Breach* was performed first in New Orleans, then Seattle and finally New York City. The performances of Yuyachkani are performed throughout Peru and in many countries throughout the world.

In her book *Theatre Audiences: A theory of production and reception*, Susan Bennett explores the concept of “intercultural ‘exchange.’” She writes, “Sometimes the theatre audience is inscribed by the production as a kind of cultural tourist (albeit a socially responsible one) in another’s life in a way that masks the complicated cultural trajectory which has brought the work to the point of a performance” (196). There is indeed great risk of performances that address national traumas being viewed through the eyes of a “cultural tourist” without giving background and context to the performance and the events that inspired the performance. I could think of a no more “complicated cultural trajectory” than plays that address national traumas with their complex historical backgrounds and cultural nuances that may or may not translate to audiences that view the performance outside of that context. Therefore, it seems important that these performances receive particular treatment from production teams, dramaturgs,

etc., in order to convey the appropriate amount of information to audience members so that the performance does not merely become part of what I call disaster pornography.

Producers and creative teams of such traveling performances might turn to theorists including Stacy Wolf who describe the process of meaning-making that occurs with audiences. Although Wolf does not directly address transnational performance in her dissertation, "Theatre as social practice: Local ethnographies of audience reception", her work is useful in understanding what happens when audiences see a performance that is specific to one geographical location creating new, local meanings for that performance. Wolf writes, "My experiences also confirm the notion that, however larger cultural discourses shape the range of possible meanings, those meanings are made and enacted locally, on a level not macro but micro, in a realm not only aesthetic but social" (3). I have seen performances addressing national trauma performed outside of that nation that audience members then use to relate to their own local events. For example, after Hurricane Katrina I saw a production in Los Angeles of *En Un Sol Amarillo*, a play by the Bolivian theater group Teatro de los Andes that portrays the aftermath of a devastating earthquake that left the inhabitants of a rural Bolivian town vulnerable to corruption and violence by the governmental agencies that entered the town after the disaster. The parallels between the natural disaster - turned manmade disaster - that the play addressed and the events that had taken place in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina were immediately noticed by myself and other audience members who mumbled comments to each other during and after

the performance. The play's program made direct connections between the two events.

Terms such as transcultural (Versényi) and intercultural performance (Bennett) are used to describe theater that moves from one culture into another or blends multiple cultures together. Bennett addresses the concept of interculturalism with a concern that intercultural performance, rather than asserting cultural identity might homogenize cultural specificity to the point of "white-washing" (170). But she also allows for what she calls the notion of "exchange" (196). Performances that travel outside of their original site of trauma and are performed for audience members unfamiliar with the event opens up the opportunity for such an exchange. By making connections between events that have taken place locally and what is portrayed on stage, a type of transcultural and in some cases transnational empathy and understanding may take place (by relating it to local events the "othering" process that sometimes occurs when people view events taking place in other countries via television may be diminished). For example, the audience members for *En Un Sol Amarillo*, were able to more quickly connect with what had taken place in Bolivia because of their own more local and recent experience with Hurricane Katrina. Experiences such as these may create a sense of an international community and of responsibility to that international community. Bennett does concede that,

[. . .]the theatrical can provide a methodology, an experience and the kinds of connections with others, either in production or reception, which make those confrontations into negotiations and which, at best, offer imaginations whereby we can see our own and others' stories if not better, then at least somewhat differently. (203)

## **Form**

After Auschwitz, Theodor Adorno wrote that to write *lyrical* poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric. The form of lyricism, he felt, was inappropriate for the themes brought up by Auschwitz. In fact, in the time leading up to and after the Holocaust playwrights including Brecht and Samuel Beckett addressed these issues via the form of their work. The performances that I discuss in this dissertation have also been reflective of the nature of trauma via their form. *The Breach* and *Sin Titulo* both break a linear narrative form and interweave plotlines, reflecting the difficult nature of constructing a linear narrative of a traumatic event.

*Patriot Act* uses monologues, songs, dance and humor to address the somber topics of September 11<sup>th</sup> and the US Patriot Act. While I do not explicitly address the use of humor in response to national traumas, in the future I believe it would be worthwhile to apply theories on the use of humor to respond to trauma (scholars have written about this in regards to art addressing the Holocaust and activism around the AIDS epidemic) specifically to national traumas.

With an expansion of the work of this dissertation, I would like to further explore the relationship between form and performances that address national traumas. In particular, I believe a more expansive look into the use of humor to address trauma could be very useful in understanding coping mechanisms.

## **Final Thoughts on National Trauma and Performance: Collective Working Through**

For Freud, a subject's experience of trauma is defined by the unconscious repetition of the trauma through enactments, nightmares and behaviors. National traumas may in fact be unconscious repetitions of previous traumas (Hurricane Katrina a repetition of the trauma of slavery, the Peruvian Dirty War a repetition of colonialism and systemic racism). The repetitious nature of performance makes it a logical medium to express the repetitious nature of trauma. Performances, such as those discussed in this dissertation, also often point to the "scenarios" (Taylor's term) that are (re)played out during national traumas.

After a traumatic event those impacted are left with the process of working through that event. After a national trauma there is a collective working through of the event. Performances that address national traumas can be seen as both the repetition of (in this case perhaps unconscious as well as conscious) and the working through of the traumatic event. Many art forms are utilized, including theater and performance, to grapple with the questions that people are left with after a traumatic event. Theater and performance distinguishes itself from other forms such as photography or poetry for a number of reasons including but not limited to the facts that the experience of watching an embodied performance reflects the embodied experience of trauma and the collective experience of watching performance is also reflective of the collective experience of national traumas.

Performances about national trauma also point to the larger performance of nation, nationhood and identity in relationship to the nation. *Patriot Act* and *Sin Titulo* in particular point to the performance of identity as it relates to

patriotism and national belonging. National traumas play a critical role in the production of national belonging, a production that not everyone is allowed to participate in. Many of the performances addressed in this dissertation directly and in some cases indirectly point to the performance of national belonging while at the same time placing on stage those whose identities normally exclude them from the national performance of belonging. In all of the cases explored in this dissertation citizenship played a critical “role” in the way people were treated before, during and after the national trauma. After September 11<sup>th</sup>, people’s citizenship status became less important than whether or not they participated in the performance of patriotism that dominated the post-September 11<sup>th</sup> rhetoric. For example, Americans who were Muslim, were considered *less* American after September 11<sup>th</sup> (we can see this (re)played out when Obama was “accused” of being Muslim, as if a) that mattered and b) that made him less American). In New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, people were referred to as refugees and treated both in discourse and action as though they were not part of the nation. However, as I point out in the chapter, the treatment of black, lower-class people in New Orleans and throughout the United States before Hurricane Katrina made what took place in the city after the storm, in fact, not surprising. In Peru, the non-citizenship status of the Peruvian indigenous populations for many years and the invisibility of those populations within the national identity even after they attained citizenship, greatly contributed to the violence that took place during the country’s Dirty War. It is important to critically analyze the construction of events as national traumas, or not, because these events and the way they are

placed in the cultural imagination after they take place, illuminates vital information about larger constructions of citizenship, nation and nationhood.

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